

A SERIES OF
DISCOURSES
ON THE
PRINCIPLES and EVIDENCES
OF
NATURAL RELIGION

AND THE
Christian Revelation.

And on some proper Practical SUBJECTS.

By SAMUEL BOURN.

VOLUME I. 326

*That to the Height of this great Argument,
I may assert eternal Providence,
And justify the Ways of God to Men.*

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A SERIES OF
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OF

NATURAL RELIGION



PRINTED BY J. JOHNSON, ST. PAULS CHURCH-YARD.

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MDCCLXX.

C O N T E N T S

OF THE
FIRST VOLUME.

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who giveth instruction in the night, who
teacheth*

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being

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INTRODUCTION.

THAT there are so many and great evils in this world, and that Christianity has had so little effect in remedying those evils; are the two main objections to natural religion, and the Christian Revelation.—How far these objections are removed in the following discourses, every one will judge for himself, who vouchsafes to read them with attention, and who thinks subjects of this nature worthy of his inquiry and reflection.

In the contemplation and study of the boundless universe, the more accurate and extensive our views become, the more marks of wisdom and goodness we discover, and the more the evils of the world appear

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to be diminished; or to be admitted for wise reasons, and conducive to salutary ends. Hence arises a probability, which continually increases in proportion to the increase of our knowledge, That in respect to the universal constitution of things and the whole purpose of eternal providence, there is no evil nor imperfection: and that how weak or imperfect soever any species of creatures are formed, and tho' made liable to do and suffer many evils; yet they are formed for a *good* purpose, fill their proper place, and are a right and requisite part of an infinite and perfect whole.

Philosophy refers us to the remote worlds and parts of the universe, the invisible scale of beings ascending upwards, and the probable relations and proportions which this world and its inhabitants may bear *at present* to those distant worlds and superior natures. The *Christian revelation* directs our view to *Futurity*; and represents the scene

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scene of this world as introductory to another, and as terminating in a glorious revolution; when all the evils of human nature shall be abolished, and the virtue and happiness of mankind for ever established: it refers us then to remote ages, and the relation which *present* times and events bear to *future* changes and the periods of eternity.

The effects of a *particular revelation* in the world, if it be left to the voluntary use or abuse of mankind, must of necessity be *similar* to those of the *universal revelation* of nature. And it must either be *so left*, or else a supernatural or miraculous power must be employed universally and perpetually, in order to secure it from abuse, and to preserve and establish its influence on mankind. Thus indeed, most or many of the evils of the world and the vices of human nature, might, in probable appearance, be prevented or remedied. But to suppose that those evils, which result

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from the very frame of the world and of human nature, should be thus removed; is supposing infinite wisdom to superinduce a plan of operations coincident yet inconsistent with the plan of nature.

Miracles made use of in the introduction of a particular revelation, are in some measure similar to the divine operations in the formation of the world and of mankind, and may conspire to the same end. But the universal and perpetual use of them would in effect subvert or change the plan of nature, and consequently could *not* conspire to the same end. Hence arises a strong presumption, that the miracles reported in various legends, as wrought every where and for trivial purposes, are *Counterfeits*. But to determine from hence, as an *ingenious writer* hath done, That *no* miracles were ever wrought, for any purpose, or in subservience to the ends for which the world and mankind were made; is determining a question by prejudice, which

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which can be decided only by human experience or testimony.

The *same* ingenious Author appears to be so sensible of the clearness and strength of the *Apostolic testimony* to the reality of the miracles related in the *Gospel*; that with all his subtlety, he finds no other way to evade it, than by asserting, That miracles are in their own nature *so incredible*, that they cannot be made credible in *any* circumstances, by *any* human testimony whatsoever, tho' connected with the highest *moral reasons and ends*; an assertion entirely *modern*, contrary to the judgment of the wisest men in all past ages, and to the common sense of mankind; who have always thought the general supposition, of *some* miracles being wrought for *some* ends, *so very credible*, that they have been ready to believe them in *every* circumstance, on the *slightest* testimony, and separate from all moral reasons or *important* ends.

Our

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Our own experience, and the testimony of others concerning *their* experience, are two different sources of our knowledge, which this writer sets in opposition to each other; and as an over-balance to all *testimony* in the case of miracles, He *sophistically* puts into the opposite scale, under the name of *experience*, what is really a want of it, or, *no experience at all*.—The experience of the Apostles was *different* from, but *not contrary* to that of the rest of mankind: just as the experience of those who have felt an earthquake, differs from, but is not contrary to that of all others who have never felt one.—Or, as it appears to all our senses, and to vulgar experience (or more properly *inexperience*) that the earth is at rest; when upon the *testimony* of Astronomers, we *believe* it to move with astonishing rapidity.

Another and *late noble writer*, who was very capable of distinguishing between the *Apostle Paul's defence* of Christianity against the
the

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the objections and prejudices of the Jews, and *Christianity itself*, which he had before delivered to them; yet confounds them together, and abuses the Apostle's character in the most invidious expressions, because he used such arguments with the Jews, as were most proper to overcome their prejudices. He charges him also with teaching the doctrines of an election of particular persons to eternal Salvation, without respect to their actions; and of unlimited obedience to the most absolute tyranny. Thus he endeavours to throw an odium upon his writings and character. But if any writer was to comment upon any *other ancient Book*, with such ignorance or misrepresentation of his Author's sense and spirit, as this *late noble writer* does, together with many others, both Deistical and Christian, upon the *New Testament*; what a contemptible figure would he make in the republic of letters?

It

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It is with regret we have observed, that a *Right Reverend Advocate* for our holy religion, instead of telling us plainly, what that Christianity is, which he means to defend, and giving us a clear definition of it; hath left reason to suspect, if not his total want of sincerity, yet that his main intention was to vindicate, not so much the doctrines contained in the New Testament, as some articles that lie elsewhere. Otherwise, the Christian cause would have been more highly obliged to him, for employing his ingenuity and eloquence in its defence.

Sincerity of intention, perspicuity of language, and strength of argument, are essential characters of a good Author upon the subject of religion: especially, there ought to be no room for suspecting (which ever side the Author espouses in any controverted point) that he had any other design than that of investigating and recommending

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commending truth. A discovery of artifice and sophistry, or of designed misrepresentations, or of party-views, ought to fix a more *indelible* blot of disgrace upon his writings, than even his ignorance of the subject upon which he pretends to write.—But by this rule, how many Authors, both Deistical and Christian, would immediately sink into perpetual disgrace!

The Author of the following discourses is willing to have his writings tried by this rule; which is the only merit he assumes to himself. And as to any errors which may possibly be imputed to him, his apology lies in the following words of *Cicero*; which he would heartily recommend to the consideration of all who write or think upon religious subjects:—

“* Hoc autem liberiores & solutiores sumus, quod integra nobis est judicandi

* Cic. Acad. Quest. Lib. 4.

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potestas : neque ut omnia, quæ præscripta & quasi imperata sint, defendamus, necessitate ulla cogimur. Nam cæteri, primum, ante tenentur astricti, quam quid esset optimum judicare potuerunt : deinde, infirmissimo tempore ætatis, aut obsecuti amico cuiusdam, aut una alicujus, quam primum audierunt, oratione capti, de rebus incognitis judicant, & ad quamcunque sunt disciplinam quasi tempestate delati, ad eam tanquam ad saxum adhærescunt. Nam quod dicunt omnia se credere ei, quem judicent fuisse sapientem, probarem ; si id ipsum rudes & indocti judicare potuissent : statuere enim quis sit sapiens, vel maxime videtur esse sapientis. Sed, ut potuerunt, omnibus rebus auditis, cognitis etiam reliquorum sententiis, judicaverunt ; aut, re semel audita, ad unius se auctoritatem contulerunt. Sed, nescio quomodo, plerique errare malunt, eamque sententiam quam adamaverunt pugnacissime defendere ; quam, sine pertinacia, quid constantissime dicatur, exquirere."

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“ But we are so much the more free and
“ unconfined, as we preserve entire our
“ privilege of judging, and are under no
“ obligation of defending whatever hath
“ prescription, and as it were authority,
“ on its side. For other men are from the
“ first confined and fettered, before they
“ are capable of forming a judgment; and
“ so proceed to determine upon the most
“ difficult subjects, at a time of life when
“ their understandings are the weakest;
“ either in deference to the opinion of some
“ friend, or being captivated with the
“ discourse of some person whom they
“ first heard: and whatever system they
“ happen to be thrown upon, cling to
“ it, as to a rock. As to what they
“ say of their putting an implicit con-
“ fidence, in the judgment of one whom
“ they believe to be a wise man;—I could
“ agree to it, provided ignorant and il-
“ literate persons were capable of judging
“ who is a wise man: but this very thing
“ appears to me to require the greatest wis-
“ dom.

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dom. The fact hath been, that men
“have either judged for themselves, as well
“as they were able, after hearing both
“sides, and knowing the sentiments of
“other men; or else, upon first attending
“to the subject, have relied wholly upon
“the authority of one man. But most men,
“I know not how, chuse rather to remain
“in an error, and defend most obstinately
“their favourite opinion, than to examine
“without bigotry, and find out what is
“most rational and consistent.”

“either in the
“mind, or being captivated with the
“discourse of some person whom they
“first heard: and whatever system they
“happen to be thrown upon, cling to
“it, as to a rock. As to what they
“say of their putting an implicit con-
“fidence in the judgment of one whom
“they believe to be a wise man;—I could
“agree to it, provided ignorant and il-
“literate persons were capable of judging
“what is a wise man: but this very thing
“appears to me to require the greatest wis-
“dom.”

D I S-

ADVERTISEMENT
TO THE
READER.

IT is taken for granted in the following discourses, that the writers of the New Testament always mean, by the term *Ἀνάστασις*, or resurrection, a restoration to life; or that operation or event, by which the person who dies passeth from death to life, or from a state of inaction and insensibility, to a state of action and enjoyment; without any reference to what becomes of the body. The reasons are as follow.

(1.) If we understand the word *resurrection*, as denoting simply a restoration to life; the language of the New Testament on this subject is perfectly intelligible and uniform:—but is ambiguous, if not unintelligible, if we understand that word, as having a reference to the body.—This

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reason will appear to those who carefully examine and compare the several passages.

(2.) THERE is no such expression to be found, in any of the writers of the New Testament, as a *Resurrection of the body*, or of the *flesh*: and it is very unaccountable that they should never use such an expression, if such was their meaning.

(3.) THE Apostle declares, that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of GOD*; *neither doth corruption inherit incorruption*. But if there shall be a resurrection of the body; and the spiritual incorruptible bodies of men in the future state shall be composed of the same materials as these mortal bodies;—then *flesh and blood* may be said to *inherit the kingdom of GOD*, tho' differently modified, and *corruption* is made *beir to incorruption*.

(4.) THE Apostle's enumerating the different bodies in the visible creation, 1 Cor. xv. is foreign to his purpose, if he meant to illustrate a resurrection of the body: He ought rather to have pointed out to our observation the changes and transformations which the same bodies undergo. But if he meant to shew, that the divine power may invest men in a future state with

with other bodies of a different kind, in exchange for these animal bodies; then his enumeration is directly to the purpose: he leads us to a view of the visible creation, which serves to elucidate his subject; and he adds with propriety, *There is an animal body, and there is a spiritual body*, i. e. a body of a kind totally different from the other.

(5.) THE same Apostle expressly guards us against the gross notion of a resurrection of the body, in the very place where he uses the comparison of plants rising from the seed:—*Thou fool, that which thou sowest, is not that body which shall be; but GOD giveth it a body as it hath pleased him.*

(6.) THE Apostle assigns to the present and the future body, not only different, but contrary qualities: one is *corruptible*, the other *incorruptible*; one, *animal*; the other, *spiritual*. As far, therefore, as we can determine from the properties assigned, they cannot be the same body.

(7.) OUR Saviour produces an argument (Luke xx. 37.) to prove the resurrection, in opposition to the Sadducees who denied it, which is utterly inconclusive and nothing to the purpose, if they meant by that term

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a resurrection of the body. And therefore, the term there must necessarily be understood, in the simple and general sense, of a person's being raised to life, or to a future state.

(8.) FROM the vulgar notion of a resurrection of the body, it has been inferred, That there are two future states, one prior, and the other subsequent to that resurrection; and that the souls of good men shall enjoy a state of glory and happiness prior to that event, and then shall receive an addition of glory and happiness by their reunion with the body. But the New Testament says not a word of any such addition at the resurrection, or of any life or happiness prior to it; and speaks but of one resurrection and one future state. From which it may be presumed, that the supposition of a resurrection of the body, as well as these inferences drawn from it, are founded merely in human imagination.

(9.) By supposing a resurrection of the body, we needlessly involve the doctrine of the New Testament, concerning a resurrection and a future state, in difficulties and objections; arising from the perpetual change of the materials of which our present

sent

T O T H E R E A D E R. xxxiii

sent bodies consist, and their being incorporated with other bodies, and from other considerations.

(10.) By constantly taking the word, *Resurrection*, in the plain and general sense, of men's being raised from death to the possession and enjoyment of another life, we shall preserve the simplicity of the Gospel, and shall find its doctrine, as well as language, most intelligible and rational.

At death men apparently sink into a state of inactivity and insensibility. To this state every person is reduced at the moment of death; and many persons for some time before they are certainly known to be dead. This is the plain, simple, primary notion of death, and the state of the dead: viz. A cessation of life. Life consists in activity, sensibility, and the use of certain powers or faculties, all which may be either increased or diminished. By diseases or old age they are gradually diminished, till at the moment of death they entirely cease, and life is ended. The question then occurs, Whether after men die, they shall be raised from the dead? i. e. whether they shall be raised from that state of inaction and insensibility, to which they are reduced

at

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at the moment of death, to a state of activity, and to the use of the same, for any other senses, powers, or faculties? and if they shall at any time afterward be so raised; then there is a resurrection of the dead, and a future state. And it may with equal propriety be termed a resurrection; whether they are restored to life immediately after the moment of death; or whether they remain for a period of time in a state of *death*, i. e. a state of insensibility, or as the New Testament-writers elegantly term it, *sleep*, which is the nearest image or resemblance of the state of the dead.

It is by departing from this simplicity of natural ideas, and by intermixing many additional and metaphysical speculations and distinctions, that men have confounded the Gospel-doctrine of a resurrection, and have strangely appropriated that term to the *Body*, instead of applying it to the *Man*, or the living, thinking, acting principle in the body.

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The apparent Intentions of **DIVINE**
WISDOM in the Constitution of
the World, and of Human Nature.



VOL. I.

B



DISCOURSE I

The apparent Intention of Divine
Wisdom in the Constitution of
the World, and of Human Nature



P S A L M civ. 24.

O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all.

TO be convinced that all things are formed and conducted by Infinite Power and Wisdom, to the worthiest ends, is the best foundation of religion in the minds of men. This conviction must arise from an attention to the works and providence of God: and in order to it, we must enter thoroughly into the sentiments of the Psalmist in the text, *O Lord, how manifold are thy works; in wisdom hast thou made them all.*

INFINITE power, knowledge, and goodness, may be considered as comprehending all the perfections of God, so far as we

are able to conceive of his nature. His *wisdom*, then, is not to be defined as a distinct attribute; but as consisting in the application of his infallible knowledge and almighty power in obtaining the purposes of his goodness: it implies his *design* in all his operations, and his employing the fittest means in order to the best ends.

As to the *supreme and ultimate end*, which the All-wise Creator and Ruler hath in view, in the infinite and eternal scheme of his creation and providence; it is most rational in itself, most honourable to God, and most agreeable to the natural sense of every good mind, to believe that this end can be no other than the greatest good or happiness of the universe in general. But this being so immeasurable an object of our view, infinitely exceeding our utmost stretch of capacity to conceive of in an adequate manner; we are but very incompetent judges, what things, or what order
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and constitution of things, may be most conducive or requisite to that end.

In the works of any human agent, the greater the design, and the deeper the skill of the operator, the more difficult it becomes for us to judge aright of the several parts or means, or to comprehend the whole, though the whole be laid before us; and we are often ready to imagine an error in those very parts, where, if we understood the whole, the greatest excellence of design would appear: how much more, in the operations of an infinite mind, whose thoughts and ways are above those of men, as the heaven is above the earth? How much more incapable must we necessarily be, of estimating the fitness of things and events? How much more liable to judge erroneously, where all that we see, or can discern, is so minute a part of an infinite whole?—That there are numberless systems of rational beings superior to, or different from, the system of man-

kind, is what philosophy and revelation concur in inducing us to believe; the one by the discoveries made of the material, the other by the intelligences given us of the intellectual creation. What connexion the order and constitution of things on earth have with those other systems, we cannot comprehend; but neither philosophy nor revelation leads us to imagine, that the human race is a detached and independent part of the creation, having no relation to other rational beings.

THIS may suffice to convince us, how unable we are to judge adequately of the divine works; and to shew us, whence it comes to pass, that many things in the creation and order of Divine Providence, appear, as they necessarily must, to our narrow minds, imperfect, inconvenient, or evil; because we cannot possibly know the connexions and dependencies subsisting between one part and another throughout the universe. Many partial evils may

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be seen and felt, which we may, and ought to resolve, by a rational faith, into the unsearchable wisdom of God; either as being conducive, though we cannot discern how, to the universal good; or as necessarily resulting from those fixed laws and constitutions, which are requisite to that end.

AND indeed, if it were not so, if nothing appeared unaccountable in the creation; where would be the exercise of our faith? Where the virtue and excellence of that *trust* in the wisdom and goodness of God, which the *holy scriptures* justly represent, as the noblest principle of action in the human mind? — The excellency of this faith consisteth, not indeed in believing contrary to, or without evidence, but in being fully persuaded by those evidences which appear in nature, that all things are directed and governed by the perfect wisdom and goodness of a Sovereign Mind; and in adhering to, and act-

ing upon this persuasion, notwithstanding the many difficult appearances, and seeming imperfections in the formation of things, and the conduct of Providence; notwithstanding all the partial disorders and evils, which, by divine permission, take place in the world.

THAT it is reasonable for us to act on this principle, with respect to the councils and ways of God, is evident beyond contradiction, from that general state of society, in which we think it right to behave in the like manner, with respect to the designs and actions of *men*. For, if the welfare of a nation be so great an object of view, that few persons are competent judges of the means most conducive to that end; and if, on this account, it is reasonable in subjects, to submit to, and confide in, the direction of their governors, upon a general presumption, and without any infallible proofs of their wisdom and integrity, and though the fitness of their measures

tures is not always apparent; if it is reasonable to put so much confidence in human governors, of whose capacity and good intentions we have had little or no experience; how much more reasonable is it to have faith and confidence in God, when we have so various evidence, and constant experience, of the wisdom of his works, and the goodness of his intentions; when, at the same time, we are so unable either to comprehend that infinite object, the universal good, which is the supreme end of all his designs, or to determine what means are most conducive to it; when, notwithstanding the unfathomable depth of his counsels, and the immense extent of his designs, notwithstanding the littleness of that portion of his works and ways which is subject to our inspection, and the narrowness of the human mind, and incapacity to judge adequately of that little part; yet there occur to our observation more, clearer, and stronger evidences of the wisdom of God in his visible works, and

and with respect to mankind, as employing fit means to answer good ends, than the subjects of any human government have, or *can* have, of the wisdom of the ablest and best of governors, or than any particular person hath, or *can* have, of the wisdom of any other person or agent whatsoever.

IN proof of this, we shall proceed to consider the *inferior, intermediate, and subordinate ends*, which the wisdom of God appears to have in view, in the formation of this world, and the order and process of things in it. Our knowledge of the rectitude and goodness of *these ends*, which are manifestly *intended and answered*, at present, by the order of things in this world, is the *foundation* on which we must build our judgement and belief of the *supreme intention* of the Almighty in all his operations and appointments.

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Now the ends which the wisdom of God appears to have in view in the constitution of this world, and the things in it, are these following.

FIRST, the production and preservation of life:

SECONDLY, the pleasure of his creatures in the enjoyment of life:

THIRDLY, their acquisition of knowledge:

AND, lastly, their attainment of virtue and religion. —

THESE we shall consider, first, separately; and then, in connexion with, and subserviency to each other.

In the first place, it is evident, from the slightest view and observation of the state of the world; that the production and preservation of life is one end intended by the All-wise Creator. This

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is indeed so obvious as to need no illustration. Can any person doubt of this, who sees the multitude of living creatures inhabiting the earth? who considers the various provisions made for their subsistence suitable to their different natures? who observes even the destruction of some to be the preservation of others, and the removal of one generation subservient to the succession of another? 'Tis not known how many millions there are of mankind; and of brute-animals the number is far greater: and, if we descend to the minuter living creatures, too small for human sight, the number is increased to an inconceivable degree. Wherever there is a proper receptacle or habitation, there we find suitable inhabitants; and in many states and conditions, in which we should think it impossible for living creatures to subsist, did we not find them actually subsisting. These all draw their support from the world around them, fill up their place and time, till others succeed in their room.

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The world is full of life, in states and forms wonderfully diversified. Considering the *effect* then, there can be no doubt concerning the *intention* of the cause, and we are irresistibly convinced, that communicating and preserving life to vast numbers of creatures, is one end of the Creator in his formation of the world: and therefore, that he is to be acknowledged in the character of *the Giver and Lord of Life*.

SECONDLY: The pleasure and felicity of his creatures in the enjoyment of that life, is a farther intention of the Almighty Maker, in his construction of this world, and the things in it. This is also proved by experience and observation, and is the primary natural foundation of our belief of the Divine Goodness. For, notwithstanding all the pains and infelicities to which mankind and other creatures are, by their nature, subject; yet the pleasures and felicities of life so far surpass and over-balance them, that no considerate and impar-

impartial observer can hesitate in affirming, that the design of the Creator, in giving life to the numberless creatures which inhabit the earth, was not to make that life grievous, but on the whole comfortable and agreeable. Even the lowest creatures have their enjoyments, and shew more symptoms of ease and delight, than of pain and trouble: for the bounty of God is extended to them; *he openeth his hand; they are filled with good*; he affords a grateful sustenance to the beasts of the field, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea: all receive a portion of the things agreeable to their nature.

BUT, as the capacities of the inferior creatures, both with respect to enjoyment and suffering, are far less than those of mankind; so the proofs of the Creator's benevolent intention are proportionably less apparent and certain: and they will be most convincing and satisfactory, if we attentively consider the condition of the

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human life: for here we not only have our own *experience* for the ground of our knowledge; but also find a more extensive field of evidence; where the effects of the Creator's beneficence, and the proofs of his intention are widely diffused, and afford the strongest conviction, that this life was designed to be, upon the whole, agreeable and delightful to men.

THIS, indeed, is so much the natural and universal sentiment of mankind, founded on experience, that nothing is more usual than to hear of the *sweetness* of life, how dearly men prize it, how unwilling to relinquish it, how ready to sacrifice every thing for the preservation of it: even when deprived of many great comforts and satisfactions, and confined to a very narrow condition, by want of health, loss of sight, extreme poverty, old age, or other afflictions; yet still life has not lost all its *sweetness*, but retains a certain charm that makes men to love it, and to be de-

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firous of preserving it. — The kind assistance and company of friends, the curiosity of learning and knowing current events, and the gratification of the few faculties which remain to them, are circumstances that mollify the pains and infirmities they labour under, and have a most pleasing flavour, which corrects the bitterness of their cup. So kindly hath Providence tempered even the afflicted and distressful periods of life, that they have a mixture of something agreeable, and are not entirely miserable. And besides these mitigating circumstances, such afflictions are short in duration, compared to the seasons in which men live free from such complaints, have the enjoyment of their health and faculties, and find life to be an agreeable possession, abounding with various entertainments:

To whatever part of the creation we turn our view, there is something to entertain either the senses, the imagination, or the

or the understanding. The whole appearance of Nature hath a majestic and pleasing aspect: It shews in its countenance the goodness no less than the grandeur of the Creator. Is not the light itself, that prime production of creative power, a glorious and heart-cheering object, which salutes our opening eyes every morning, throwing aside the curtains of night, and presenting anew the great scene of moving nature? Is not the very sight of our fellow-creatures agreeable, and the idea of society, acquaintance and friendship delectable to the heart; as the returns of food are grateful to the palate? And are not these our *daily delights*, and *common* to all mankind?

BUT had it been the Creator's intention to make human life miserable; if we suppose (a horrible supposition it is) that the Almighty Being had formed this world, and placed mankind in it, with a malevolent design;—how entirely different would our

condition have been, and the whole state of things reversed?—We might then have abhorred life as much as we now prize it; have as earnestly sought for death, as we now avoid it; have hated society as much as we now love it; and the very sensation of existence might have been incessant pain and anguish: Ghastly despair would have been painted on every human visage, and the conversation of society uttered nothing but dismal lamentations. Whereas in fact, the natural countenance and language of mankind bespeak, not grief and despair, not weariness and loathing of life, but satisfaction and joy in it; and shew how grateful the intercourse of society is to them. Any instances to the contrary are so extremely rare and singular as to raise astonishment, and occasion an enquiry, what unusual and unheard of calamities have befallen them?—It is possible, that the extraordinary violence of pain, or the dire oppression of melancholy, or a peculiar concurrence of calamitous events,

events, may make men weary of life, and to say with Job, *that they loath it, and prefer death.* But these are *exceptions*, and very *uncommon* exceptions, to the general course of nature and condition of human life.

MEN may indeed, (as some writers have done) by collecting together and crowding into the same scene, all the disorders and evils, to which the body and mind of man and the state of human society are liable, give a horrible representation of the miseries incident to mankind.—But if they intend *this* for a just description and true picture of life in general, it is a sign, only that themselves have a very dark and disordered imagination: or else, they find it necessary to misrepresent and blacken the condition of mankind, in order to make the appearances of nature agree with some absurd doctrines, which they want to justify. Nothing can be more partial and false, than to select the *worst* and most un-

usual situations to which men are ever reduced, and describe them as the *usual* and general condition of mankind. For ever adored be the goodness of Divine Providence, that we have such abundant experimental conviction, that the health of life far exceeds all diseases of it; and the delights of society are far more than the disquietudes arising from it; and the happy enjoyment of life in every respect, far superior to the pains and troubles of it; and that in the *usual* state of things, they who are labouring under grievous afflictions, or oppressed with dire calamities, are very *few* in comparison of the *multitudes*, who are rejoicing in health and peace and the various blessings of life!—Is not then the goodness of our Creator sufficiently discovered and proved, by the superior prevalence of good and happiness in the whole? And are not all objections arising from the evils and miseries which are in the world, light and inconsiderable, when

when placed in the balance against such superior weight of evidence?

To suppose, that it is inconsistent with the perfection of divine goodness, to permit *any evils* in the world; that is, to create beings liable by their nature to any degree of suffering, or to bestow any measure of happiness that is not pure and perfect; is a supposition, which ought to be rejected as arbitrary and groundless, whilst we are so little capable of judging what may be requisite to the ends of perfect goodness. And it may be justly observed on the other hand, that on this very supposition, the Almighty Creator prescribes a rule to himself, which seems to limit the designs of his goodness, and diminish the effects of it; by excluding out of the creation those numberless states and kinds of creatures, which are possible, and in which the good over-balances the evil. Whereas, if the operations of omnipotence extend to the production, not only of

all states and degrees of entire or unmixed happiness, (if such are possible) but also of all *other* states, in which the good exceeds the evil, and which are consequently *eligible* upon the whole;—Then his goodness is full, perfect, immense, productive of all possible good: and the *imperfect* or *mixed* states, such as that of mankind and the inferior creatures, are necessarily included in the *plenitude* of the divine works, and contribute to the perfection of the infinite creation.

It deserves to be considered also, that we have no faculties or senses which are not the inlets of delight: and tho' in their own nature they are liable to, and do in fact sometimes become the avenues of pain and grief; yet those pains are a necessary warning against danger, and guard for the preservation of life, whilst, at the same time, the frame of the world and the qualities of all objects around us, are adapted much more to gratify and please, than to offend

offend and hurt our faculties of perception; and those elements, which in themselves might as easily contribute to our torment or destruction, are so tempered and balanced, as to be continually ministering, not only to the support, but to the pleasure of mankind.

THE study and knowledge of nature affords *delight* to the mind: and the more men contemplate the structure of the world and the things in it, the more of order and beauty do they perceive, and are the more charmed with the admirable marks of divine skill and benevolence, and the more will they be animated, in imitation of divine goodness, to study and promote the happiness of society; and the higher and nobler *pleasure* will they derive from such their benevolent and godlike attempts and actions.

FINALLY, with respect to those evils and afflictions, which seem so considerably

to diminish the happiness we might otherwise enjoy in this world, it is of great importance to observe, that the happy enjoyment of this life is but *one part* of the divine intention, or *one end* of his view, in the formation of this world and of human nature, and it is most reasonable to believe, *not the principal*: And the divine goodness should be understood and acknowledged, in giving us such sufficient and undeniable marks of his indulgent Providence and regard to our present happiness; at the same time that he hath farther and *greater* ends in view. Was this a state of enjoyment unmixed with any sufferings; we might conclude, that the happiness of this life was our all, and that the purposes of God, with regard to mankind, extended no further. But as things are actually ordered, the appearances of nature and the experience of life lead us to conceive some other more important and extensive purposes of Divine Wisdom and Goodness, in regard to mankind; by training us up
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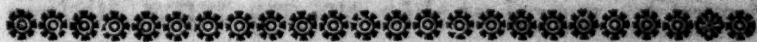
to such degrees of *knowledge*, *virtue*, and
piety, and the teaching us such *Wisdom* as
our nature and state are capable of: —
Which will be considered in the following
discourses.

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DISCOURSE II.

The apparent Intentions of DIVINE
WISDOM in the Constitution of
the World, and of Human Nature.



The knowledge of him is high above all
heights deep below all depths, extended far
beyond all extent, no finite being can
comprehend him: the utmost investigation
can and must enlarge our conception of the
highest

DISCOURSE II.

The apparent distinctions of Divinity
in Adam in the Constitution of
the World, and of Human Nature.

The purpose of this discourse is
to show that the distinctions of
Divinity in Adam in the Constitution
of the World, and of Human Nature,
are not real, but only apparent.

JOB XXXV. 10.

But none saith, Where is God my Maker, who giveth instruction in the night, who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven.

TO enquire after God our Maker, with a view of understanding, as far as we are able, his designs, and conforming to his will, is our highest wisdom. — But what are we able to know of him? — *Can we by searching find out God; can we find out the Almighty to perfection?* — No: The knowledge of him is high above all height, deep below all depth, extended beyond all extent: no finite being can comprehend him: the utmost investigation and most enlarged conception of the highest

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highest of creatures, fall infinitely short of his perfection.

BUT are we able then to attain no knowledge of him? Are our faculties so narrow as to exclude every glimpse of him, and to admit and retain no conception of his nature?—This would be denying our own reason, and degrading ourselves to a level with the brute-creatures.—God hath distinguished us with a rational nature above them: *He teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven.*—It is therefore our privilege, and our duty, and one end of our creation, to enquire, Where, and what is God our Maker, *who hath put a spirit into man, and whose inspiration hath given him understanding,* and who is day and night instructing us in the knowledge of himself. It is our honour and happiness, that we are capable in any measure of discerning the marks and exploring the effects of his

his matchless power, his unerring wisdom, and exuberant goodness.

AND his immense unsearchable perfection ought not to discourage our humble and sincere enquiries; but is a consideration proper only to damp that pride and conceit, that self-sufficiency and insensibility of our own ignorance, which would obstruct our enquiries, and prevent our attainment of real knowledge. A due sense of the narrowness of our understandings, and the boundless extent of the divine perfections and works, is one excellent qualification for acquiring the knowledge of God. And the means and advantages we are furnished with to this end, are many; and sufficient to encourage and animate us in our pious endeavours.

FOR, the most sublime and unknown Being, is at the same time, and without any contradiction, the most condescending, the most familiar, and the most intelligible.

ble.—Tho' no eye can behold him, yet his Deity is clearly seen in the visible creation: tho' no thought can comprehend him, yet something of him may be understood by every creature around us. If indeed we attempt to gaze on the excessive effulgence of his glory, we are instantly struck blind and lost in profound darkness: if we attempt to penetrate into the most holy recesses of his nature, we are immediately thrown to an infinite distance from him. But if, with a becoming sense of our own weakness, and the narrow limits of all human knowledge, we do not vainly attempt to pry into those *secret things which belong unto the Lord our GOD*, but are content with the manner and measure of knowledge allotted to our feeble nature; if instead of aiming directly and intuitively to contemplate him, we diligently observe and catch the scattered rays of his glory reflected on every side from his works; and to discover him where, and as far as, he intended to make himself discoverable

coverable by us; we shall then act in a manner becoming our reasonable nature, and shall arrive at a larger and more certain knowledge of the Attributes of God, than we can possibly have of the qualities of any other nature or person in the universe: we shall see more manifest and astonishing effects of *his* power, than of any other power; shall discern more admirable contrivances of *his* Wisdom, than of all other Wisdom; and receive more ample proof and satisfactory experience of *his* Goodness, than we can have of the Goodness of any creature whatsoever. We shall find that all the mighty operations of the potent elements, all the curious strokes of human art and sagacity, all the love of the kindest human affections, are but so many streams issuing from the fountain of his fulness, diffused thro' various channels to the world of mankind. There is no power which he did not delegate, no wisdom which he did not teach, no good-

ness which he did not intend, no joy or happiness which he did not bestow.

CAN creatures endued with reason, then, remain unknowing of their Creator?—As it is impossible to comprehend his infinitude and absolute perfection; so it seems equally impossible, on the other hand, to be totally ignorant of him. For all his works discover something of him; and we are utterly ignorant of ourselves and of the world around us, if we know nothing of God. The apprehension of a DEITY results immediately from the very consciousness of our own existence; as we are certain that we did not, nor could give life or being to ourselves. Every creature around us points out a Creator; as we are certain, that they, as well as we, were unable to produce and form themselves. We have not the least doubt, from the marks which *men* discover, whether *they* act with intelligence and design: yet there is no other

other being that does or can exhibit so numerous and so evident marks of his own presence, his power, his wise intelligence, his benevolent purposes, as the Almighty Creator is continually presenting to our observation and experience. For all places are full of God: he is always present with us; always addressing himself to us, in the silent but convincing language of nature around us; speaking to our senses, our understandings, our consciences, and every faculty of our nature. That sovereign incomprehensible being, who is exalted above all thought, who rules with infinite empire over numberless worlds, whose nature no created capacity can ever measure; is the constant guardian, the indulgent parent, the familiar instructor of every human creature; incessantly administering kind supplies in various forms, to feed the body, to please the sense, to amuse the imagination, to sooth the heart, to inform the understanding, to rectify the judgment, to meliorate the temper, and

to raise the soul of man by gradual advances to those excellent purposes for which he designed it. So that the most sublime and unsearchable of all Beings, is at the same time, and with perfect confidence, the most familiar and obvious, the most easily and certainly to be known. His wisdom, his intentions are as manifest as the light of the sun, and as much the subject of our experience as the enjoyment of life itself. We are qualified by the faculties of our minds to make inquiries after him; are always surrounded with conspicuous marks of his power and wisdom; and in every agreeable moment of life are enjoying his goodness. And it was one intention of his creating mankind, to lead them to such knowledge of himself, as he hath given them means and faculties of acquiring.—*He hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth, and hath predetermined the condition and boundaries of our habitation; that we might search after and find him: For he is*
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not far from every one of us: for in him we live, move, and have our being.

WE have in a preceding discourse considered the production and preservation of life, and the comfort and felicity of his creatures in the enjoyment of life; as ends *intended and answered* in the formation of this world and of mankind. And it will appear with equal evidence, Thirdly, that our acquisition of knowledge was a *further* intention of the Almighty Creator.

ALL instruction comes from God, the original fountain of wisdom and knowledge, by whatever persons or means it is conveyed to us: It is *HE who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of the heaven.* The brute-creatures have a sense and sagacity proper to their kind, and are taught by *nature*, that is, by the Creator, as much as is requisite to their subsistence and the purpose of their being: the knowledge of

mankind is limited by the same wise rule and proportion, and is in the whole as much, and no more, than is proper to their superior rank, and subservient to the higher ends of their existence. And it is as manifestly the intention of the all-wise Maker, that mankind should acquire a knowledge, surpassing in degree and extent, that of the lower animals, as that he should excel them in any other instance.

THIS divine intention will strike our minds with a more lively conviction, if we attend to the gradual process, by which men arrive at that portion of knowledge, which they are severally possessed of; if we observe the gentle steps, the measured proportions, the skilful methods, the insinuating advances, by which the faculties are distended and knowledge introduced into the mind; by which the instructions of the all-wise Creator distil by little and little, and are imbibed thro' various avenues by the growing appetites and capacities

pacities of the soul; by which his parent-hand leads us from infant-ignorance to maturity of understanding.

In the beginning of life the human soul subsists with few ideas, according to its minute capacity. But they multiply fast: every thing is then new, and consequently an object of wonder; and the inquisitive curiosity is adapted to, and gratified with, a continual accession of new objects. And when the stock of ideas is sufficiently encreased; the comparing and judging faculty begins to operate upon the materials which sense hath furnished:— It orders and disposes, unites and separates, divides and compounds, distinguishes like and unlike, equal and unequal, fit and unfit, beautiful and deformed, good and evil, —Here reason commenceth; and is henceforward continually employed in disposing the intellectual furniture of the mind, arranging every thing in due place and order, reviewing its internal fund of knowledge,

and by new images and new reflections still adding to the number, variety, form and order of the whole: rising continually from things more simple, clear, and easy, to things more complex, obscure, and difficult; from material, to moral and spiritual objects; and finally ascending to the highest and noblest degree in the scale of human knowledge; and from the whole of what we previously see and know, learning to know this: that an eternal all-perfect being is the cause of all, to whom we belong, and from whom we derive all good.

—Is there no design of creative Wisdom in this admirable and evident process of nature?—Is not here the finger of God visible, teaching men knowledge?—Did he not intend thus to disclose to us his works, and consequently lead us to the study and contemplation of himself?—He seems to be destitute of the reason of a man, who does not perceive this divine intention and procedure, by which *men learn more than*

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*the beasts of the earth, and become wiser than
the fowls of heaven.*

THE general branches of knowledge, which the faculties of the mind in their mature state are adapted to acquire, and which, education, the objects of the world, and the events of life are fitted to teach; are at the same time the most important and most useful to mankind: this plainly argues the wise and beneficent design of the Almighty Maker.

THE first branch of knowledge is that which respects ourselves and mankind around us, the relations, dependencies, connections, interests, inclinations, customs and laws of human society. This qualifies men to live in society, and to behave as subjects of law and government, and in a manner proper to domestic and national obligations. And parental instruction, mutual converse, daily experience of the events

events and transactions of the world, and the whole process of life, are continually teaching this science.

THE second branch of knowledge is that of a Supreme Being, as the maker and disposer of all things, the all-wise governor of the whole world, the just judge of mankind, and the original author of all good. — This knowledge hath a general tendency to restrain men from evil, and incite them to goodness, and to confirm the bonds of social order, virtue and happiness. And this knowledge is constantly taught by the still eloquence of universal nature, *The heavens declaring the glory of GOD, the firmament shewing his handy-work; day unto day uttering this instruction, night unto night revealing this doctrine:* Every object in the visible creation, the order, uniformity and variety conspicuous in the whole, and the faculties of our own minds, all indicating the same divine cause; and all our know-
ledge

ledge of every kind leading to and terminating in this one most momentous and certain truth.

AND these two kinds of knowledge, so important and so beneficial, are common to mankind in general: they are not peculiar to the great, the wealthy, or the learned: the vulgar, the poor, and the illiterate have their share, and partake of the same divine instruction: all are taught and educated of GOD in these most excellent sciences. But He doth not in like manner teach and instruct *the beasts of the earth or the fowls of heaven.*—Here is man's superiority and excellency. The brutes cannot say, *Where is GOD our Maker?*—They can form no conception of him, make no enquiries after him: nor can they attain to any idea of those rules, engagements, and connections, which are the support and happiness of human society. They are not capable either of *religion* or of *law*. But man, by the faculties with which the
Creator

Creator hath indowed his nature, by the means which providence hath furnished for his use, by the objects presented to his observation, and by the whole experience of life, is trained up and exercised to the knowledge of himself, of his fellow-creatures, of God his Maker; and consequently to the government of *law* and of *religion*.—And it manifestly appears to have been one design of the all-wise Maker, in the creation of this world, and in forming the human species, to lead them to this knowledge, and in these noble respects, *to teach them more than the beasts of the earth, and to make them wiser than the fowls of heaven.*

I shall only add the following reflections.

FIRST, It becomes us to acknowledge with all gratitude the liberality and kindness of our Creator, in forming and designing us for the acquisition of such excellent and valuable knowledge; and in bringing

bringing us to the possession of it, by the most wise constitution and admirable process; implanting the imperceptible seeds of this knowledge in our infant-nature, cherishing the growth of them by kindly influences, and the culture of education; 'till they come to maturity, obtain their full proportion, and produce the intended fruits.—What thanks and praise are due to our divine instructor; who thus condescends to teach his creature man, who thus by familiar steps and gradual advances raises him to the sublime knowledge of himself!—If we are thankful for bodily supplies; how much more should the nobler gifts of reason and understanding, and that knowledge which is the dignity and preheminance of man above the beasts, move our gratitude and excite our praise!

SECONDLY, If it was the intention of our all-wise Creator, in the faculties and means which he hath imparted to us, that we should acquire knowledge; let us observe and pursue

pursue that intention, by a diligent improvement of our advantages. Does the infinite eternal being vouchsafe to be our teacher, and shall we refuse to learn? — Is every thing around us fitted to convey instruction to our minds; and shall we not admit the sentiments of Wisdom resulting from an observation of those things, and from our own constant experience? — Our dependance upon and obligations to one another as members of society, and to God the Maker and Ruler of the world, as his creatures and subjects, are clearly discernible in the material creation, and in the social nature and state of man. Can we lift up our eyes to the heavens without being struck with a lively apprehension of that infinite mind who fills heaven and earth, and who with amazing Wisdom and power hath framed this universe of things? Or can we converse in human society, without being sensible of our mutual obligations, and discerning the beauty and worth of justice, truth, sobriety,

briety, fidelity, and benevolence?—Such knowledge is not too high for us: we may easily attain to it: nothing more is requisite than our calm and willing attention: our faculties are adapted to the attainment of it; and all objects and events conspire to direct and assist us in such enquiries. And as this knowledge is easily attainable, so it is most delightful to a well-disposed mind. Nothing should give us so much joy and pleasure, as to discover the admirable marks of divine Wisdom, and to perceive the intentions of infinite Goodness; and to consider ourselves as belonging to the great community of the world, and under the protection and government of an Almighty Father. It is a most natural and pleasing enquiry;—*Where is GOD our Maker, who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven?*—It is our shame and reproach, if we suffer bodily passions and worldly desires, to usurp the possession of our minds, and exclude these nobler sentiments;

timents; or to destroy our taste of and delight in such contemplations, which so directly conduce to elevate the soul of man, and incite him to a conduct becoming the excellence of his spiritual nature.

THIRDLY: The knowledge of God, and of the visible intentions of his Wisdom and Goodness in the frame of the world, in the faculties of our minds, and the orders of society; is the best preparation for understanding and embracing the *gospel* of our *Saviour*. Another life and a world to come is indeed the grand object and peculiar scope of the *gospel-revelation*. But the discoveries and knowledge of natural religion relating to this life, and the present sensible effects of creative Wisdom and Goodness, are introductory to the other. We must first believe in God, before we can have faith in *Christ*: we must previously hear and learn of the *Father Almighty*, before we come to *Christ* duly qualified for his instructions. If we are not first
made

made sensible of the effects of divine goodness in *this* world; how shall we hope for greater effects of it in *another*? If we do not perceive the wise and kind intentions of the Almighty Father in creating us to *this* life; how shall we believe his intention to raise us to a *future* and *immortal* life?—But having laid the foundation in a knowledge of God as our Maker, revealed in the works of nature, having beheld his glory reflected from the visible creation, and being convinced of his goodness by familiar experience; we may then proceed to the *revelation* of the *gospel*, and see his glory shining also in the face of *Jesus Christ*; and may receive with joyful and firm hope the inestimable promise of eternal life, which GOD who cannot lye hath promised: we may rest satisfied in a most happy assurance, that the same divine power and goodness which have raised mankind to a pre-eminence above the lower creatures in this world, will also raise all good men to a superior state in another world, excelling

60 *The apparent Intentions, &c.*

in capacity, honour, and happiness, all that we can enjoy in this life.

By our natural birth and constitution, we are endowed with the privileges of a rational life in this perishable and mortal state. And if we wisely improve present advantages, there is a glorious everlasting constitution, which God hath established in *Christ Jesus our Lord*, in order to our rising again from the dead to the enjoyment of immortality. The resurrection of our *Saviour* himself from the dead, is the evidence of this revealed hope: for as *God raised him from the dead and gave him glory*; we may therefore have *faith and hope in GOD*, and wait with an assured expectation, that the purposes of his goodness extend to, and shall be accomplished in, a future and everlasting life. *Which God of his infinite mercy grant thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.*

D 15.

ACTS XVII. 26.



DISCOURSE III.

The apparent Intentions of **DIVINE**
WISDOM in the Constitution of
the World, and of Human Nature.

In works and institutions, there are two ex-
tremes equally to be avoided. The one
consists in a vain imagination, that we are



and able to comprehend all the ends, for
which the world in general, and the things
in it, are made; as if infinite wisdom could
have no other, for its purposes, in the
creation of the world. **E 2** and the several parts

The apparent intention of
the Almighty, that, through this
trial, we may enjoy in this life.

For the natural mind is constituted,
to be satisfied with things as they are,
and not with things as they are not.

And if we wish to be satisfied
with things as they are not, we must
be satisfied with things as they are.

For the natural mind is constituted,
to be satisfied with things as they are,
and not with things as they are not.

DISCOURSE III.

The apparent intention of Divine

Wisdom in the Constitution of

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Wisdom in the Constitution of

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observation, and terminates in the supple-
of it, than such as are apparent to human

~~ALL INFORMATION CONTAINED HEREIN IS UNCLASSIFIED~~

assumption.—The other extreme consists

Acts xvii. 26.

He has made of one blood all nations of men

to dwell on the whole face of the earth; and

bath determined the times before appointed.

and the bounds of their habitation: that

they might seek the Lord, if haply they

might feel after and find him.

There is such an astonishing concu-
rence of the various parts of the world,

IN forming a judgment of the divine

works and intentions, there are two ex-

extremes equally to be avoided. The one

conflicts in a vain imagination that we are

competent judges of the divine operations.

competent, judges of the civil operations,
and able to comprehend all the ends for

and, able to comprehend all the ends, for which the world in general and the things

which the world in general, and the things
in it, are made, as if infinite wisdom could

In it, are made; as it infinite wisdom could
have no other, or higher purpose, in the

have no other or higher purposes in the
 nature of a selfish individual being in the world

of it, than such as are apparent to human observation, and terminate in the support and happiness of mankind: an imagination founded merely on ignorance and presumption. — The other extreme consists in a negligent and ungrateful inattention to those evident marks, by which we may clearly discern the intentions of divine wisdom and goodness towards mankind, and may learn and pursue the ends for which we ourselves were made.

THERE is such an astonishing concurrence of the various parts of the world, to the support and benefit of human life; that the more we study the process of nature, the more clearly shall we be convinced, That this was *one object* of the Almighty Creator's view, in the formation of the world. The light and heat of the sun, the temperature of the air, the falling rains, the fertility of the earth, the produce and growth of vegetables and animals, the whole constitution of the globe, have a manifest

manifest direction and subserviency to the advantage and pleasure of mankind. Our experience and observation of nature, therefore, should lead us to acknowledge the Creator's Benevolence; who, amidst all other and greater designs of his infinite wisdom, hath intermixed so much condescension and regard, in so wonderful a manner, to the necessities and desires of our feeble and mortal nature.

It should lead us also to another most important enquiry, To what end we ourselves are made. For the same unerring wisdom, which hath formed the elements, the plants, and animals of the world, with such a subordinacy to man and convenience to human life; hath undoubtedly formed man himself also, and with a view to some superior ends. And the wisdom and happiness of man, as a reasonable creature, consists in his understanding and voluntarily contributing to those ends, for which his nature was formed.

Now in order to understand to what end any thing was made, we should consider what is the best use to which it can be applied. In order to know the end and purpose of our creation, we are to consider what are the worthiest actions we are capable of performing in life; what conduct is the most honourable and becoming; what pursuits are most agreeable to those faculties of our nature, in which we excel the lower creatures; what things reason and conscience point out as fit to be done, and worthy of a reasonable being. Hence we shall easily apprehend and conclude, that the practice of virtue and true religion is a principal end of our creation, designed by divine wisdom in the formation of human nature.

We have in former discourses considered the intentions of creative wisdom, as apparently discovered in the production and support of life, in the comfort and felicity of his creatures in the enjoyment of life,
and

and in that share of speculative knowledge which men are fitted to acquire: we shall now endeavour to shew, that the divine intentions do not terminate here, but proceed to a further end, namely, their attainment of *Virtue and Piety*.

SOME men of corrupt minds have been ready to plead in favour of their criminal indulgences, that human nature is framed to no higher end than the gratification of the animal passions and appetites. And others have maintained a worse doctrine, tho' with a better meaning; and have asserted that mankind are framed and fitted by their nature to all manner of evil, and to the love and practice of the greatest wickedness. Such persons have adopted notions contrary to experience of facts, and to the express testimony of *Holy Scripture*; and charge *their own* most absurd inconsistencies, upon the operations and designs of infinite wisdom; by setting the constitution of nature and the dispensations of

~~visible~~ grace in the gospel in opposition to each other. But the divine purposes and operations, how various soever, can never be contradictory. The wisdom of God is always consistent with itself, and all his works are in perfect connection and harmony; all co-operate, in design and effect, to the same ends. It is owing to human ignorance if men do not discern that consistency; and a proof of their prejudice and folly, when they impute their own invented contradictory schemes, to the designs of unerring and immutable wisdom.

The divine dispensation revealed in the gospel is purfuant to and perfective of the divine intentions which appear in the constitution of the world and in the frame of human nature. For the gospel-dispensation was preordained, as the *holy Scriptures* assure us, *before the foundation of the world*, in the eternal counsels of God: it was then a part of the original plan of creation, and

was the superstructure intended to be built upon the foundation of nature. The manifest design of the *gospel* and of the *divine* *gospel* revealed in it, is to bring men to the practice of virtue, from the noblest principle of obedience to God and hope of his favour. And does not the same divine intention appear evident in the structure of the world and of human nature? Our *Apostle* affirms that this was the divine intention in creating mankind, considered in their state of nature, and previous to their enjoying the privileges of the *gospel*. For addressing himself to a *heathen* audience of learned men and philosophers, he says that God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the whole face of the earth, and determined their *stays* and condition, that they might seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after and find him: including in the meaning of his expression, not only the speculative knowledge, but principally the practice of religion, and the consequent favour of God: for he is not far, adds the

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Apostle,

Apostle, from every one of us, as it is in him, we live and move and have our being.

Now to illustrate this assertion of the *Apostle*, and shew this divine intention in the structure of the world and the process of human life; let us observe, in the first place, that as mankind are led by nature thro' a series of gradual advances to the acquisition of *Knowledge*; there is the like gradual procedure in bringing them to *Virtue and Piety*.

THERE are certain general principles and habits, which if not virtuous themselves, are a necessary foundation of all virtue; and which the constitution of the world, the frame of our nature, and the whole oeconomy of life, conspire directly to produce in the minds of men.

THE first is *Obedience*: and it is easy to observe, how the state of infancy and youth, and the dependance on parental power

power and authority, or on other kinds of human government, are admirably adapted to accustom mankind to subjection. The strictest discipline and severest government have so far a good effect, as they inure men to obedience. The inclemency of the elements, the calamities of life, the subordinations of society, and even the injuries we receive from men, are continually teaching us, not to expect that all nature shall yield to our will and inclination, but to bend our wills to the laws of nature and the authority of superiors: — a most important lesson; and preparatory to religion; which consists in a voluntary obedience to the will of the Supreme Governor and Father of the universe.

ANOTHER general principle or habit which the constitution of the world is fitted to produce in mankind, is *Industry*, which is preparative to all virtue: for from the dead stock of idleness, what fruits of virtue and goodness can be produced? Thro'

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Indolence men neglect all those studies and employments, by which they might either improve themselves, or be useful to others. Instead of exerting their faculties in the attainment of knowledge, or in beneficial services to mankind; they are lost in ignorance, and become an useless burden to themselves and to society. Sloth enfeebles the soul, exposes it to temptation, and to ignorance often adds pride, conceit, luxury, effeminaey, and sensuality. It is then the parent and nurse of many vices. On the other hand, industry invigorates the mind, nourishes all virtuous and pious dispositions, bringing them into life and action, encreasing them by exercise, and making them exemplary to others. As no good can spring from idleness; so it is only by wise and honest diligence, that all worthy ends are attained, all honour and reward deserved.

AND does not every thing in nature conspire to prevent or expose idleness, and

to

to enforce and encourage *industry*? The bodily necessities and natural appetites of mankind; the laws and offices of society; the advantages arising from a culture of the earth, and a commercial improvement and exchange of its various products; the desire of wealth; and the love of praise; these and various other causes in nature are continually operating, to compel or invite men to an industrious exertion of their faculties: which is one great preservation and ground of human virtue.

ANOTHER general habit, pre-requisite to virtue, is *Sociability*. In a state separate from all society there could be no room, occasion, or opportunity, for the exercise of virtue and the fruits of piety. Man would live to himself alone, insignificant, useless, and miserable. The social state and temper of man is the general foundation of all the particular relative affections, and of the dispositions of justice, sincerity, fidelity, compassion, and, that extensive

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Christian virtue which comprehends all; charity.

AND it is superfluous to observe how strongly nature leads men to *society*, or how the *social temper* is naturally cherished and directed by education, instruction, and mutual intercourse. Nothing is more certainly deducible from sensible experience than that the all-wise Creator framed and intended human nature for *society*.

THUS we may discern, by a common attention, and without any deep researches into nature, how the wisdom of God hath adapted the constitution of the earth, and of mankind its inhabitants, to produce in them a disposition of *Obedience*, a habit of *Industry*, and a temper of *Sociability* or humanity; all conducive to the practice of virtue and religion.

LET us proceed to observe, fourthly, that *Conscience* is a general principle implanted in

in human nature, which *directly* serves to deter men from wickedness, and incite them to virtue.—The all-wise Creator hath infused *a sense* into the hearts of men, by which they are taught to see a beauty and worth in virtuous dispositions and actions, and a deformity and malignity in vice: so that the mind is immediately affected with an approbation, or censure, and an idea of merit, or guilt, resulting from an action, without waiting to examine the consequences, as injurious or beneficial to ourselves or to society. This is an admirable provision in our nature; as the understanding or speculative reason, would often be too slow, or too cool, or too much perplexed, and admonish and deter men from bad actions, and lead them to a right and just conduct. *Conscience* has a quicker and warmer operation, striking with an inward horror at the thought of wickedness, and suggesting a secret confidence and pleasure in virtuous designs and actions.

To this we may add, Fifthly, *a sense of honour* and reputation arising from one kind of behaviour, and *of shame* and reproach from the contrary. This is well known to be a general and powerful principle in human nature. And, upon the whole, it operates in favour of virtue; restraining men from base and criminal actions, and exciting them to such as are in themselves worthy and commendable. For tho' the praise and censure of the world are sometimes grievously misplaced, thro' accident, ignorance, or prejudice; yet virtue and sincere piety, have a natural and allowed claim to the esteem of mankind; and vice as naturally inherits their *odium* and contempt.

MEN may in like manner be led to virtue and religion, by *Experience* of the transactions and events of life, by observing the actual consequences of virtue and piety on the one hand, and of impiety and wickedness on the other, in regard both to
private

private persons and publick societies. For tho wicked men may sometimes appear to prosper, and to enjoy pleasure, or increase in wealth, by their very wickedness; such instances are *not frequent*, or according to the general Course of human affairs; and the examples of men reduced to disgrace, poverty, diseases, or an untimely end, by their vices, are far *more numerous*. The more accurately we observe the consequences of different conduct, the more we shall be convinced, that honour, peace, and security are the usual and natural effects of a religious temper and virtuous conduct; and that impiety in principle, and villainy and debauchery in practice are the *high-road*, not to honour and happiness, but to infamy, misery, and destruction in this world. By example and experience men are taught the mean and wretched consequences of intemperance and profligacy; the tormenting sensations and dire effects of envy, malice, and violent wrath; the corroding cares and perplexities of avarice

and ambition; the mortifications of pride; the reproach of injustice and perfidy, the terror that springs from guilt; the anguish of a wounded conscience; with all the bitter fruits which the poisonous plant of *sin*, when grown to maturity, seldom fails to produce in abundance: they learn on the other hand, the value of a good conscience, the delight of benevolence and generous affection; the importance of self-command, the worth of a good reputation, and the courage and hope which spring from conscious virtue. Thus the course of human life is adapted by the wise intention of the Almighty Maker, to teach men this moral and practical wisdom by their own observation and experience.—Happy they, who in pursuance of this divine intention, are reclaimed from vice by experiencing the misery of it: and still happier they, who prevent repentance; and without tasting the bitter fruits of vice, learn virtue by the instruction and example of others.

LASTLY,

LASTLY, the intention of the all-wise Creator to lead mankind to the practice of virtue and religion, is apparent in that *knowledge of himself*, which he hath given them faculties and means of acquiring.— The displays of a deity in the creation are so manifest, that men naturally conceive some apprehension of a sovereign power, wisdom, and justice, presiding over the world, and are affected with some sense of religion. This apprehension serves in general, to deter from vice and influence to virtue: It is in itself, and when rationally established in the mind, the highest principle of all goodness. For the perfection of virtue consists in practising it from a steady belief of the wisdom of God in his government over the world, and a firm reliance on his justice and goodness. Men may be virtuous, in some measure and degree, from other motives. But virtue has then its greatest excellence and stability, when it springs from this pure and sublime source. Now tho' the *knowledge* and

the *practice* of religion may possibly be separated ; yet the former has a natural connection with and direct influence to the latter : And if it was the intention of the all-wise Maker to lead men, by the revelation of his works, to some knowledge of himself ; it follows, that it was also his design, to influence them by that knowledge to a virtuous life, from a principle of obedience to his will ; which is the practice of religion.—*GOD hath made all nations*, says the *Apostle* speaking in the supreme court of judicature at *Athens*, *to inhabit all the face of the earth* ; to this end, *that they might seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after and find him*.—There is a beauty and propriety in the original expression, which implies *searching about*, as it were for something in the *dark* : so that the *Apostle* intimates in this expression the *darkness* of the *Heathen* world in comparison of the *light* of the *gospel*. Yet he asserts, that even in that state, God had furnished them with proper means for acquiring the knowledge

and practice of religion. And to shew how obvious and familiar, an apprehension of God, and some knowledge of religion, is to mankind, notwithstanding the comparative darkness of *Heathenism*; he adds, that *God is not far from every one of us*, and consequently not difficult to be found: nay further, that we even *live, move, and exist in him*, and are all *his Offspring*. And in fact, mankind in general have in all ages attained to some notion and belief of religion, tho' mixed with much weakness and error; and this hath been one natural mean, by which the wisdom of God intended to deter men from wickedness, and to support virtue and good order in the world.

Thus I have endeavoured to point out to your observation, the various measures, which the wisdom of the Almighty Creator hath provided, in the constitution of the world and of human nature, which most evidently discover his intention, to

direct and incite men to the practice of virtue and goodness; by compelling and insuring them to obedience, to industry, and to humanity; by implanting Conscience in their nature, and a sense of honour and disgrace; by their own experience and observation of the different consequences of virtue and vice; and finally, by the knowledge of himself and an inward reverence of his governing wisdom, justice and goodness.

BUT if it was the intention of infinite wisdom, by the very frame of the world and the principles of our nature, to lead mankind to virtue and goodness; whence comes all the wickedness that is in the world? How can men commit so many evil and criminal actions, contrary to the leading principles of their own nature, to the instructions and admonitions continually occurring to them, and to the most important end of their creation?

IN answer to this, let it be observed, that we are vindicating the wisdom of God in the creation, in opposition to human folly, prejudice and corruption. And the instances we have alledged are great and general facts in nature, which cannot be denied; and which demonstrate the intentions of divine wisdom to every impartial observer. It is true that men often counteract those intentions: because, whatever principles and means infinite wisdom employs to bring men to virtue and goodness; yet it still leaves them at liberty to act contrary to them: otherwise this world could not be a state of a tryal, of discipline, education, and improvement.

THE wickedness of men does not in the least disprove what hath been advanced concerning the constitution of the world and of human nature, as formed and intended to lead men to virtue. For as the constitution of the human body is evidently designed for the enjoyment of health,
yet

yet is liable to various distempers ; as the constitution of civil government is *the ordinance of GOD*, to preserve peace and order, yet many public disorders still arise in society ; as the elements of fire and water are designed to be useful to mankind, yet in many instances become hurtful and destructive ; as men are enabled and fitted by nature to learn knowledge, yet there is much ignorance and error in the world, and finally, as the *Gospel* was intended to bring *Christians* to virtue and holiness, yet many remain impenitent and unreformed : so the intentions of divine wisdom, in the frame of the world and of mankind, to lead them to the practice of virtue and goodness, are apparent and manifest ; the men often resist those intentions, and turn aside to evil : *GOD made man upright, but they have sought out many inventions* : they are endued with reason, yet act unreasonably : They feel conscience directing them, yet refuse its guidance : they have a sense of honour, yet commit shameful actions :
they

they are trained up to obedience, industry, and humanity; yet sometimes addict themselves to indolence, sloth, and selfishness. And as men knowing and professing Christianity yet live *unchristian* lives; so notwithstanding all the principles and impulses of nature, men may become *unnatural* in their tempers and actions.

The conclusion is, that in every wrong action we commit, we take shame and confusion to ourselves; and avoid adding to our folly and iniquity, by charging it upon nature, and arraigning the works and designs of Almighty God, *who is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works*: that we study to understand, and gratefully acknowledge the wise and beneficent intentions of our all-perfect Creator in every thing he hath made and appointed: that we endeavour to conform to those intentions, and pursue the ends of our creation:—And finally, that with
joyful

joyful gratitude we embrace the dispensation of the Gospel; which gives us an assurance of those intentions being carried on, to a more glorious display of infinite wisdom and goodness, in a life immortal and eternal.

standing all the principles and nature, men may become wiser in their tempers and actions.

The conclusion is, that in every wrong action we commit, we take shame and confusion to ourselves, and avoid adding to our folly and inquiry, by charging it upon nature, and assigning the works and designs of Almighty God; who is righteous in all his ways and holy in all his works: that we study to understand, and gratefully acknowledge the wise and beneficent intentions of our all-perfect Creator in every thing he hath made and appointed: that we endeavour to conform to those intentions, and pursue the ends of our creation: — and finally, that with joyful

D I S



DISCOURSE IV.

The Consistency and Connection of
the Divine Intentions.





DISCUSSION.

The Confidentiality and Connection of
the Divine Intentions.



PSALM lxxxix. 47.

Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?

IN the days of health, and prosperity, when the spirits are vigorous, and the imagination and affections find many agreeable objects, and all nature seems to present its liveliest colours, and to smile with a beautiful aspect; then, “It is a fine world:” we desire no other or better: life appears to be a scene of entertainment and delight; we are very well satisfied with it; and are ready to think that this pleasure and felicity is the best and only purpose of human life.—On the other hand, in the seasons of affliction, when the spirits are enfeebled or broken with distempers or disappointments, when every object is seen in the darkest view, when all nature around us

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appears to lower, and the prospect before us visibly terminates in the gloomy cavern of death; then, "It is a dismal world,"—*All is vanity and vexation of spirit*: and we are ready to adopt the plaintive expostulation of the *Psalmist*, *Wherefore hast thou made all men in vain?*

IN both these instances, the sentiments flow, not from reason and judgment, but from temper, fancy, or passion, and are equally weak and groundless; proceeding in both, upon this *false* supposition, that our happiness in this life is, or ought to have been, the principal view of the Almighty Creator in our formation. From this false principle, and from self-partiality and prejudice, we first assume a right to compleat happiness; and when we find ourselves disappointed, and involved in trouble and perplexity; then assume a right to murmur and complain, and even to accuse nature itself, and say in our hearts, that God hath made the world *in vain?*

BUT whether human expectations are answered or disappointed, the ends which the almighty intended in the creation are always the same. Nature proceeds uniformly and consistently in its appointed course; and infinite wisdom does *nothing in vain*. Immense designs are in a continual process and execution from eternal to eternal ages; and there is nothing throughout the boundless regions of the universe, which does not answer some end, and coincide with those infinite and everlasting purposes.—Things that appear to us the most insignificant and useless, may have an use and importance unknown to us. And those things which serve the most to our benefit and pleasure, may answer, at the same time, other and greater purposes, of which we are wholly ignorant.

THE vast and glorious body of the *Sun* was made with an evident design to illuminate and warm the whole earth; and the importance and benefit of this purpose we

understand by experience. But does that grand luminary of the skies serve to no other purpose? — The discoveries of philosophy lead us to conceive far greater and more extensive ends, which it is continually answering, beyond all the benefits which the inhabitants of the earth derive from it. — So in regard to *all other parts* of the world; we have not a capacity or view sufficient to comprehend the *whole use* for which they were made.

AND if this observation be just in regard to the material and *inanimate* world; it is equally so of the *living creatures* that inhabit it; which are all subservient to the intention of the Creator, and may answer many purposes far beyond the conception of our understandings. — But men are continually referring every thing to *themselves*, and their own pleasure and advantage in life; and are with difficulty taught to conceive, that the world in general, and human nature in particular, are framed to

any different or higher purposes; than their own private pleasure and felicity. Hence it is, that when they find themselves well and happy, then, *all is well*, and the world is wisely made and governed: but when they become unhappy, then the whole system of things seems inverted, and running into confusion and disorder. — So weak and vain are our sentiments, whilst we judge of divine constitutions and intentions, by the little accidents and passions, which affect our feeble nature.

THE designs of creative wisdom run forward into spaces and ages, infinitely beyond the limits of our sense and knowledge. And the lines appear to us as abruptly *broken off*, only because we can no longer discern the *continuance* or connection. We may pursue things to the limits assigned us; but in vain do we attempt to proceed further, and pass on to things invisible, and the boundless creation that lies beyond, of which we know nothing *par-*

ticular, but by a supernatural revelation; and nothing *general*, but this one universal conclusion, which results from the whole of our observation and experience, That all things are made and governed by an all-powerful and most wise being.

EXCLUSIVE of those important discoveries, with which we are so highly favoured in the *Gospel-revelation*; the knowledge of nature presents us with numberless marks of creative wisdom, affords ample matter of instruction, and clearly points out to us several beneficent ends, which it is our wisdom, as creatures endued with reason, to attend to and pursue, as the purpose of our creation and residence in this world. These ends are, as I have endeavoured to shew in preceding discourses, The support and agreeable enjoyment of life, and the attainment of knowledge, piety, and virtue.—In the following discourse we shall further consider these several

ral ends in connection with, and subserviency to, each other.

For we are not to conceive that the all-wise Former of the world is like to human projectors, who often pull down with one hand, what they build with the other, and destroy, at one time or in one manner, what they were aiming to establish in another. The more we understand of the divine operations, the more shall we discover of harmony and *Unity* of design, be the more convinced that all things spring from *One* wisdom, whose intentions are, at no time, in no part, in no effect, throughout the universal creation, opposite or discordant, but all in perfect union and concord.

If the divine wisdom intended, as we have endeavoured to shew, by the formation of this world, to produce life, pleasure, knowledge and virtue; it necessarily follows, that these ends are pursued

in perfect *consistence*: and it is our part to examine into the real fact, and to make use of our careful observation to discern that *consistence*. And the more attentively and impartially we study the nature and state of mankind, we shall the more clearly perceive that these ends *differ* from each other, no otherwise, than either as *means* differ from the *end*, or as the *same* object may appear different, when viewed in *different* lights.

LIFE is previously necessary to all enjoyment of happiness, and to all attainment of knowledge and virtue.—The delights which God hath indulged to human life, and which render it upon the whole a happiness, are the natural evidence of his goodness; without which there could be no piety or religion: they are also intimately connected with the affections of humanity and social virtue. In like manner, knowledge, virtue, and piety are the supports and means of human happiness:
and

and men become more happy in proportion as they become more wise, virtuous and religious. — So that in respect to human nature in general, and the *collective state* of mankind, these several ends are inseparably united, rise or fall together, mutually serve to augment each other, the cultivation of one necessarily infers the advancement of the other; and all jointly contribute to and constitute one object, the good of the world.

If the acquisition of knowledge, or the practice of virtue was any way detrimental to human life, or tended to encrease the calamities and miseries, instead of the happiness, of mankind; or on the other hand, if the cultivation of human life, or the happy enjoyment of it, was inconsistent with the pursuit of knowledge or the practice of religion; if any one of these ends interfered with and was *opposite* to any other; this would appear a manifest contradiction in nature; and the world would

seem to be the work, not of one all-wise Creator, but of some other beings, who had each their different ends in view, and who opposed each others designs.

BUT the wisdom of the Almighty Maker of the world is most illustriously discovered in the perfect combination of numberless different parts, movements, and methods; which may seem to a superficial observer, to aim at different and even contrary ends; yet are found, upon a deeper search and more extensive view, to unite and terminate in one and the same general end.—It is on this ground of evidence, that we acknowledge and believe that there is one God all-perfect, the cause of all things; and that there is no other but *He alone*, who hath constituted and who governs the whole world.—In the visible works of God there is discernable a perfect *Unity* amidst an immense *Variety*. There is a wonderful *apparatus* of nature for the support of human life: there is the like

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contrivance and preparation in the elements of the world and the human frame, for the pleasure, the instruction, and the virtue of mankind: and these purposes coincide in one, which is the good or happiness of mankind. For virtue itself is nothing else but sacrificing private ease, interest, or pleasure, to a more extensive good; therefore the wisdom of the Creator, by inciting men to virtue, intends the very same end, as by bestowing life, or any of the pleasures of life. The same is likewise intended by the provision made in nature for the instruction of mankind: for without knowledge there can be no happiness. — Pleasure is not good, but evil, when opposite to virtue; for it is then opposite to the good of society. Knowledge is no better than ignorance, only as it leads to virtue, and conduces to the welfare of mankind. And virtue itself is esteemable only in proportion to its utility, or the degree in which it conduces to the good of the world in general: and *that* is not a real,

real, but *imaginary* virtue, which has no tendency to the happiness of mankind.

'Tis evident then, that the creative wisdom of God, by the various provisions which he hath made in nature, for the several purposes above-mentioned, had, in the whole, one general and summary view to the good order and happiness of human society.

BUT tho' in respect to the world at large, or the whole body and state of mankind, all these intentions unite and terminate in *one*; and there is not the least opposition or disagreement; yet in respect to the state and conduct of *individuals* separately considered, there is a great difference: and it does not follow that the same divine intentions are equally united, in the nature and state of man in his *single* capacity and separate from society. Mankind in *general* increase in happiness, in proportion as they increase in knowledge and virtue: but in the instance of a *single* person, the contrary

trary is possible: and the ends of piety and virtue may be directly opposite to the happy enjoyment of life, and even to life itself. Nature may here direct and incite to contrary ends at the same time; The natural principle of self-preservation, the natural desire of pleasure, the natural impulse of conscience, or sense of religion, may oppose each other; and it may be impossible to pursue one end without destroying or abandoning the other,

NEVERTHELESS, this opposition is so far from impeaching the divine wisdom and goodness, that it serves to illustrate them, and to shew the perfect consistency of nature throughout the whole, in order to one and the same general end. — For, the selfish affections, or the desires of self-preservation and of private advantage and pleasure, are principles *necessary* in each individual. But as the selfish views and desires of individuals are often incompatible with a more general and extensive good; we may
here

here observe the admirable provision which the wisdom of the Creator hath made, in the constitution of the world and of human society, and in the reason, conscience, and affections of mankind, to induce individuals to submit *their own private interest and pleasure to the public good.* And the very *contrariety* which so frequently occurs, between conscience and appetite; reason and passion; private inclination and public affection; the precepts of religion and the maxims of self-interest; this very *contrariety* is the strongest demonstration of *consistency* and unity of design, in the all-wise Creator, as intending the good order of the world in general. The various means and intentions, which appear in all the parts of nature, terminate in *one end*, in respect to the *whole*, which is, the greatest good; and for *this very reason* are calculated to different and *contrary* ends in regard to *individuals*.—All other ends are subordinate to virtue and piety in single persons: But in society, virtue and religion

gion are subordinate to the happiness of mankind in general. Every natural faculty, affection, appetite and passion belonging to human nature hath its use; and by contributing either to the preservation, or the pleasure, or the knowledge, or the virtue of human life, is made subservient in *some* of these ways to the *one* great end, for which the world itself was made.

LET us learn just and honourable apprehensions of all the works of God.— There is undoubtedly infinite wisdom, beauty, and goodness, even where we are able to make little or no discovery. But an attentive and religious disposition will qualify men to make discoveries: for *the works of the Lord are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein. It is the character of the foolish and wicked, that they regard not the works of the Lord, nor consider the operations of his hands: and it is an impious contradiction in men to profess religion, and to ascribe titles of glory and*
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perfection to the Supreme Being ; and at the same time to throw reproach upon his works, and censure that nature and order of things, which his wisdom hath established. True piety is founded upon knowledge, and a deep conviction of the wise and beneficent intentions of the Almighty, in his works of creation and providence : and if, thro' ignorance or prejudice, we foolishly charge them with error and inconsistency ; it is no better than a vain flattery or solemn mocking of God, afterwards to celebrate his infinite wisdom, justice and goodness. We must first learn and understand the marks of divine wisdom and goodness in the creation, before we can ascribe these perfections to him with any real *meaning* or devout intention.

It must be acknowledged, that in attending to the frame of nature and the conduct of providence, many insuperable difficulties may arise : and nothing will more frequently occur, than those inexplicable

pliable appearances, which only prove human ignorance; but which human folly is apt to turn into objections against the wisdom of God and the perfection of his works. Yet there are within the sphere of our clearest observation and most certain experience, such manifest proofs of design, such illustrious marks of wisdom, such a regular coherence, such a coincidence and conspiracy of various innumerable parts and measures to one beneficent end, as nothing but stupid inattention can make us overlook.

THIS inattention arises partly from *Familiarity* itself. We are so much accustomed to see the order and beauty of the *Creation*, and to enjoy the delights of *Society*, and the improvements of *Knowledge*, *Industry*, and *Virtue*, that we forget to admire the wisdom of this divine constitution, and to be thankful for the happiness resulting from it, because they are *Continual*.

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SELFISHNESS and *Pride* also are the causes of impiety and ingratitude. God hath made every *Individual* for the sake of the *Whole*, and to be subservient to the good of the public community to which he belongs, and of the world in general. But thro' selfishness, men find fault with this most wise, just, and beautiful constitution, and think that the *World* ought to have been made for *them* alone, and not *they* for the *World*; that all men should be subservient to their particular emolument and benefit, and not their interest and pleasure be subjected to the general good.

ANOTHER occasion of infidelity and distrust of the divine intentions, is the great *calamities* and enormous *wickedness* which we sometimes see or hear of in the world; which astonish by their very *Singularity*, and so strongly affect the imaginations and passions of men, that they see nature thro' a false *Medium*, which multiplies and exaggerates the evils of human life; and they
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are tempted, by the disorder of their own minds, to imagine that confusion and disorder prevail throughout the world. —

But the great subject of our attention and admiration, and the ground of all our religious sentiments, should be the general order and happiness which constantly result from the universal constitution and operations of nature; not the particular disorders which appear as *exceptions* to the usual procedure of things. For, would it not be very absurd and ungrateful, to turn all

our attention to the destructive tempests, the conflagrations, earthquakes, and inundations, that occur once perhaps in an age; whilst we forget the constant regularity of seasons and temperature of the elements, by which they are made to conspire so admirably to the support and pleasure of human life; and refuse to acknowledge that beneficent wisdom and power, *which rules the raging of the sea, and bids the tempest to cease*, which hath fixed the solid earth on its center, diffused the balmy

air, the serene lustre and genial warmth, over its surface, and appointed that *seed-time and harvest, night and day shall never cease?*—And is it not equally unnatural and ungrateful to attend only to the accidental disorders of society, and the examples of wickedness and misery in the world; whilst we are inobservant of the usual order, the settled peace, the social harmony and joy of society, and the wide-diffused harvest of *Knowledge, Virtue, and Happiness*, which is continually springing up in the world?

BUT if the world be the work, and all events in it the effects, of infinite wisdom and goodness; could there be all those particular disorders and evils in it which we actually perceive? Could there be any evil in the world? Can perfect wisdom produce any thing but order?—perfect goodness intend any thing but good?—*Nay, but who art thou, O man, that repliest against GOD?—Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?*

thus?—Is there *nothing* to be placed to the score of human ignorance and error? — Does it follow that there is a defect in the works of creation, because *we* cannot account for every thing? Do we judge of the divine works and designs, as if we were *equal to him* in wisdom and understanding? — The real wonder is, that we are able to perceive *so much* of order and wise design, and that things do not appear in *greater* confusion to our dark and confused understandings. — And all would be in reality confusion and disorder, and there could be no order, concord, or happiness in the world, if there was not a Being of wisdom, goodness, and power superior to our comprehension, who was the Maker and disposer of the world and all things in it. Whatever portions of *knowledge*, *goodness* and *happiness* are found in the creation, they are so many proofs of wisdom and benevolence in the Creator. And if the general constitution and course of

nature is evidently directed to beneficent ends; the seeming contradiction of particular events only proves our ignorance and incompetence of judgment. To contrive and erect, out of the materials of this visible world, a system comprehensive of such magnificent appearances and various beauties, and productive of such successive *harvests* of knowledge and virtue, joy and happiness, as occur to human observation; is an operation so excellent and divine, as could not be designed and executed, but by a being whose perfections are not to be doubted of, but adored and praised, and who merits infinitely more than all the esteem, trust and confidence we can place in him. The further we extend our enquiries into the operations of nature, the more clearly we discern a wisdom and goodness forming and directing the whole; and it appears the more reasonable duty to place all difficulties to the account
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of our own ignorance, and to acknowledge the absolute perfection of the divine nature.

WE have hitherto endeavoured to demonstrate, from human experience, the *divine intentions* in the formation of the world, to produce and maintain *life, pleasure, knowledge, and virtue*; and the *consistency* of those intentions, as uniting in one general end, the good or happiness of human society. — And if this was the design of the Almighty Creator in the constitution of the world; it evidently follows, that whoever acts in a manner contrary to that design; whoever, thro' any wrong byass of private interest or pleasure, which he imagines will accrue to himself, shall become injurious to society, or shall refuse to discharge those relative and social duties, which are the foundations of public good, or shall intemperately debase and corrupt his own

nature, and disqualify himself for the duties of life; every such person is an offender in the sight of God, by following his own will, humour, fancy, or appetite, in opposition to the constitution and will of sovereign wisdom: and every such offender is liable to punishment, from that *moral* and *judicial* government, which (as I shall shew hereafter) God hath established; and which is in some measure *interwoven* with the *present* constitution of things: In the progress of his wickedness, he will meet with increasing symptoms of divine displeasure: his own conscience, mankind around him, and at last all nature will put on a hostile and menacing aspect, and will combine in his utter destruction. But he who faithfully and piously pursues the end for which he was created, will find peace in his own mind, and friendship with other men; and finally enjoy the distinguished favour of the Almighty Maker

ker and righteous governor of the universe.

AND thus, self-love and social-virtue, private happiness and publick good unite; and the ends of divine wisdom appear perfectly consistent.

DISCOURSE V.

The Order and Beauty of the
Divine Creation.

and righteous governor of the uni-

And thus, self-love and social-virtue,
private happiness and public good unite,
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fectly combined.



DISCOURSE V.

The Order and Beauty of the Vi-
sible Creation,





DISCOURSE V.

The Order and Beauty of the Vi-
sible Creation.



PSALM cxi. 2.

*The works of the Lord are great ; sought out
of all them that have pleasure therein.*

THE world is not a composition of disjointed and incoherent materials, or of parts that bear no proportion or relation to each other ; but is a regular and perfect system : and the whole earth is to be considered in this view, as one work, or *one creature* of Almighty Power, probably, amidst numberless *others* of the same *kind*, to which it may stand related in a manner unknown to us.—As every living creature on earth has a relation to its own kind, and to the whole earth ; yet is at the same time composed of parts, which have a mutual connection with, and
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subservience to each other, whereby it becomes one distinct and compleat animal; so the earth itself may have a relation to other worlds; but is at the same time a separate and entire system in itself, with respect to its constituent parts and movements; which are all made in subservience to the constitution and design of the whole.

WE should endeavour, therefore, to take such views of nature, as to be able to contemplate, in some degree, the grandeur and beauty of this magnificent production of divine wisdom; and to discern the exact proportions, the mutual correspondencies, the various counterpoises, the regular arrangements, and harmonious movements of the several parts: that by such views, our minds may be enlarged, and our hearts excited, to a more intelligent and more devout admiration of the adorable Creator.

ALL nature is divine art; and the structure and motion of every thing in the visible creation the effect of the great artificer's design. It is our *blindness* that hides the beauty, our *ignorance* that conceals the wisdom of the works of God. In every part and operation of the visible world, there is *something* of divine skill apparent to us; but far more that lies beyond our search, and eludes even the most subtle inquiry and eager pursuit of the greatest human genius. In endeavouring to discover the process of creative wisdom in any instance, we find it in one part offering itself to our view, in others retiring and disappearing.

As when the traveller takes a prospect of some river gliding along in its winding channel, and observes how it beautifies and enriches the fertile vale, and refreshes the thirsty animals which repair thither to draw in the fluid element; his view is limited to a certain extent, and he sees not
whence

whence it comes, or whither it goes; interposing hills, or woods, or the mazy subterraneous passages, stop his progressive view, and mock his curiosity:—So the divine art continually flows thro' universal nature in numberless channels; but is *perceptible* to us, only in some particular part and narrow compass of its intricate and endless currents: we view it *only* in its *near* approaches, and *where* it immediately entertains the senses or passions of mankind. —And even *here*, too many men are like the brute creatures, which graze the herbage of the field, and drink the flowing stream, without the least consideration whence they proceed, or conception of any wisdom and design in their production. So mankind, tho' enjoying in a more ample measure the provisions of nature, in proportion to their superior capacity, yet hardly reflect on the causes from which they spring, or bestow the least attention in investigating the original source. And even where the divine skill is most fully con-

conspicuous; yet familiarity prevents surprise, and produces inattention and dullness, instead of sensibility and admiration.

It is an easy thing to ascribe infinite wisdom to God: and if piety consists in words and phrases, 'tis easy to be religious.

—But in order to understand those evidences in nature, which are the ground and reason of our acknowledging the infinite wisdom of God;—to this, a habit of attention is requisite. And if the Almighty Creator intended to reveal himself to us in the works of creation (and if he did not, it would be impossible for us to come at the least knowledge of him) attention surely is requisite on our part, in order to our receiving and understanding that revelation: and it is our wisdom and duty to contemplate the works of God, in those views which most clearly discover his wisdom and goodness; that our religion may be built, not on a mere sound of language, but on real sentiment and belief.

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WITHOUT descending then to those innumerable particular instances of divine art, which might be each separately displayed, but are not so proper to a public discourse; let us select such representations or views of the world in general, as are most proper to strike our minds with a clear idea, and deep persuasion, of the forming and disposing wisdom of the all-powerful Maker. Let us withdraw our minds from the passions and accidents of mortal life, and for a moment endeavour to place ourselves as *spectators* of the vast scene of nature, and the established constitution and operations of the world. And the following appearances will naturally attract our observation:

THE grandeur and simplicity of the works of God :

The uniformity and variety :

The perpetual circulations :

The due proportions:

The equal ballances:

The multiplicity of effects produced by one and the same cause:

And the combination of a multitude of causes to the same effect.

THE first and most apparent quality which commands our attention in the visible works of God, is a sublime dignity, joined to a perfect simplicity.—The world is exquisitely adorned and enriched; yet there is no *Ostentation* in nature, no vain show, or useless magnificence: and hence arises an idea of simplicity in our view of the vast creation and the several objects in it. The works of human art are the more admired by the best judges, the nearer they approach to that mixed idea of grandeur and plainness, which is impressed on the mind by a view of the works of nature: they are admired as ap-

pearing *Natural*, but are condemned if they seem *Unnatural*; which serves to shew, that in the common judgment of mankind, nature is no other than the perfection of art; as all art is but an imitation of nature. And human art extends only to some resemblance of the surface of objects: whilst the internal texture, which comprehends much more of the plastic wisdom of the Maker, is beyond all imitation. What proportion do the most sumptuous and finished monuments of human power and skill bear to the magnificence of the creation! How low and contemptible are all the proudest works of men compared to those of God! Could we suppose a person in full maturity of sense and understanding, but who had never seen the light of the sun and the face of nature, presented on a sudden with an ample prospect of the sublime canopy of heaven, the blazing sun, the illumined atmosphere, and the florid earth diversified with its various landscapes; how would

the appearance astonish and transport him, and stamp at once on his mind the new ideas of grandeur and beauty, and excite his veneration of the wisdom and power of God.—If every person is not affected in the same manner with the same view, it is either owing to worldly cares and passions possessing his heart, or because familiarity has destroyed all surprize and blunted his sense of admiration. Mankind advancing from infancy arrive by slow degrees to the views of the creation; and when they have gained the most knowledge, the novelty becomes the least: and the judgment alone, separate from the passion of surprize, has less influence in exciting any devout affection.—Hence it is, that weak minds are more disposed to religion by an appearance of any thing new, strange, and monstrous in the creation, than by the constant view of the sublime order and beauty of the whole frame of nature. Should a comet approach near to the earth with its fiery as-

pect and formidable train; how devout would mankind on a sudden become, upon a view of this new and amazing object!

— But the appearance of the sun, that grand, resplendent, and most useful production of creative power, and the mighty periodical revolution it appears to perform in order to enlighten and warm the whole earth; this affects our judgment only; and as it raises *no passion*, so it excites *no devotion* in the thoughtless minds of most men.

AFTER this first and superficial view of nature, we may proceed to observe the *Uniformity* and *Variety*, which appear in the works of creation.—The heavens above, and the earth beneath, continue the *same* from age to age; yet afford a *Diversity* of successive spectacles: the clouded, the clear, the parti-coloured sky; the nocturnal darkness, the meridian light; the strong lustre of the sun, and the paler splendor of the moon; the immeasurable

space

space empty of visible objects, or crowded with a multitude of stars; these are the changing scenes that appear to the human eye of the celestial creation above us: and beneath, the hoary winter, the verdant spring, and yellow autumn, vary in succession the surface of the earth: How great also is the *local* variety of the same surface distinguished into the level plains, the lofty mountains, the lowly vallies, the winding slopes, the craggy precipices, the stagnant lakes, the over-flowing streams, and the vast extended bosom of the ocean. There is the like uniformity and variety in the *Vegetables* of the earth; which have all one common nature, and derive their nutriment and growth from one common parent. But what degrees of difference from the small blade of grass to the *Cedar of Lebanon*!—They are distributed into their several kinds: and those of the same kind have a very near affinity and resemblance, yet seem infinitely diversified. It is the same in respect to *Animals*, which are di-

vided by the wisdom of the Creator into separate ranks or kinds, yet have each a constitution and form, partly common to all, and partly peculiar to themselves. There is a resemblance or uniformity subsisting in some degree between the species of mankind and that of the lowest animals: and how much soever men are made superior in other respects, yet they are supported by the nutrimental supplies of the sun, the air, the earth, and the water, in common with all other animals, and even with the vegetables of the earth: and as the plants grow, come to maturity, decay and die; the same law of nature extends to all animals, even to mankind themselves. — If we consider the species of *Mankind* alone; what an amazing conjunction of uniformity and variety! Human nature is the *same* in all ages and nations: yet amidst the countless numbers, every individual has at the same time a nature and form, a capacity and countenance *different* in some respect from every other

other of his fellow-creatures.—It seems as if the wisdom of the Creator intended to produce the greatest possible change and variety in the creation, consistent with an immutable general plan of the world, and uniform constitution of every species of creatures. They are *divided* into the two classes of animals and vegetables, *subdivided* into the several distinct general kinds, those kinds into particular species, and every species *multiplied* into numberless individuals.—Hence there is no creature in the world single and solitary, or that hath not a relation to others of the same kind; nor any kind, that has not some affinity to other kinds, or a proper relation to the world in general.—This uniformity of nature amidst an endless variety, constitutes the order and beauty of the world: and this arrangement of the creatures in it, shews the disposing wisdom and œconomy of the Creator, which hath assigned to all a determinate rank and state, and rendered it impossible to confound the relations

or distinctions which he hath established.

—If we examine carefully the *minuter* productions of nature, the smallest insects, or the leaves, flowers, and fruits of plants, we find a wonderful mixture of the *various* and the *uniform*, that strikes the mind with a sensible and pleasing idea of order and beauty.—If we understand and consider therefore, the like admirable arrangement as taking place thro' universal nature; it will unavoidably teach us to ascribe, from a rational and solid conviction, perfect wisdom to the Supreme Disposer.

ANOTHER view of the world may lead us to *the perpetual Circulations* discernible in it.—The sun, moon, and stars perform their appointed courses with a stated unerring motion: and without entering into the mysteries of astronomy; if we only ask ourselves, What it is that upholds and directs them? How they come to know their seasons and courses? What enables
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them

them to travel incessantly with the same unremitting force? Why they never fall to the earth? Or wander thro' the pathless desert of the sky? In a word, why they *never err*?—These questions will necessarily turn our attention to the *unerring* wisdom of the Creator; who either supports and guides them by his own immediate power, or has lodged those mighty unknown springs in nature, which are sufficient to move the celestial wheels, and to impell and direct the heavenly orbs, with an inconceivable swiftness and perfect regularity.—There are also constant circulations in the *lower elements*, tho' not so obvious to a common eye or understanding. For not only the *Air* is in a continual agitation and flux, driven to and fro round the whole globe, the *wind veering about and returning again to the same point*; but the *Waters* also travel their destined round without ceasing. The rivers discharge themselves into the sea; and from the vast surface of the ocean are exhaled
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the vapours, that form the swelling clouds; which empty them in showers upon the earth, and penetrating into the hills supply the springs; which are gradually augmented, and become rivers; which feed in return the wasting ocean.—Solomon had observed, in that early age of the world, all *these* circulations of nature: Eccles. i.

5. *The sun ariseth and goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose: the wind goeth toward the South, and turneth about unto the North; it veereth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits: all the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.*—

The like circulation of fluids is observed by anatomists in the body of every living creature. The whole mass of blood is incessantly flowing thro' various channels, distributing the proper alimental juices to every part, and returning back to the heart from whence it came.—The soil of the earth is constantly expending its richness

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in the growth of every plant, and the harvests which it annually affords, yet is not exhausted; because the tribute which it pays it receives back, by an endless circulation of the nutritious particles.—All these apparent revolutions in nature lead us to apprehend a first mover and a directing cause, whose wisdom hath established them, and probably *many others* not discoverable by us; in which things move in an imperceptible maze of changes, 'till they return to their former situation, and begin again their appointed courses.

THE *regular proportions* observable in the several parts of the world, are a further evidence of creative wisdom in the structure of the whole.—For as in the fabric of every plant and animal, the several parts bear a due proportion to each other and to the whole: so it is of the world in general: the parts were all formed by rule and measure, proportionate to each other and to the whole system. The respective
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magnitudes of the sun, the moon, and the earth, the quantities of land and water, the height of the mountains, the depth of the seas, the weight of all solids and fluids, the size of every species of animals and vegetables, are determined in the fittest proportion. Every part of nature is weighed and measured, by the unerring skill of that Being, whom the prophet elegantly and sublimely represents, as *holding the ocean in the hollow of his hand, meting out heaven with his span, comprehending the mass of the earth in a measure, and weighing the mountains in scales and the hills in a balance.*

AND further: as the world is composed of elements and powers, many of which are not only different from, but contrary to each other in their operations; the wisdom of the Almighty Disposer admirably appears, in having so *adjusted* their respective forces, that there is an everlasting opposition and strife, without any prevailing
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so far as to subdue and destroy the other, which would produce universal ruin and destruction. The gravitating and projectile forces, the causes of heat and cold, of moisture and drought, of storms and calms, are ballanced against each other; and by this perpetual equal strife the world subsists; and from this incessant *war*, are derived the *peace* and order of the creation, and the security of life. In like manner there are in human nature various *counterpoises*, between the bodily appetites and the mental principles, between self-love and social kindness, between fear and hope, affection and resentment, the desires of ease and of advancement, of saving and of expending: and from this perpetual *discord*, springs the *harmony* and the variety of human life.

In all these views we may be able to catch a glimpse, and to form some imperfect notion of that vast unsearchable wisdom of God, by which he framed and disposed

posed this visible universe, and established the constitution of the world in general and of human nature in particular.—We shall proceed, in the following discourse, to some other views, proper to display the same creative wisdom.

In all these views we may be able to catch a glimpse, and to form some imperfect notion of that vast and glorious world, by which the human mind is formed and directed.



DISCOURSE VI.

The Order and Beauty of the Vi-
sible Creation.

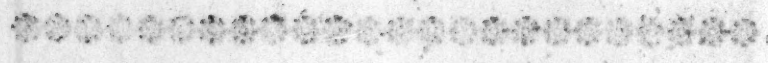


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DISCOURSE VI.

The Order and Beauty of the Vi-
sible Creation.



they prove with the utmost certainty, that
~~there are many greater in the Maker of~~
 mankind. And the questions of the Psalm

contain the strongest reasoning:—
 that formed the Psalmist to say:—He that

PSALM CXI. 3.

*The works of the Lord are great; sought out
 of all them that have pleasure therein.*

Can that power which furnished mankind
 with all the means and objects, and the

THE little portions of knowledge
 which men are able to acquire, are
 like scattered rays derived from the Father
 of lights, the eternal fountain of wisdom.
 If there was no wisdom in the Creator,
 there could be none in the creature: the
 work cannot be wiser than its Maker.
 And it is sufficient to expose the absurdity
 of Atheism, and the unnatural folly of
 every Atheist in the world, only to observe,
 that he pretends to have more knowledge
 than that power which made him, and which
 gave him the little share of wisdom which
 he hath. Whatever degrees of wisdom
 and goodness are to be found in mankind;

they prove with the utmost certainty, that there are much greater in the Maker of mankind. And the questions of the *Psalmist* contain the strongest reasoning:—*He that formed the eye, shall not be see?—He that planted the ear, shall not be hear?—He that teacheth men knowledge, shall not be know?—*Can that power which furnished mankind with all the means and objects, and the very capacity, of seeing, knowing, designing and acting, be itself blind, ignorant, unskilful, undesigning in its operations?—If we were able to make fewer discoveries, than we really are, of the wisdom of God in the Creation and general constitution of the world, of the beneficent ends which he intended, and of the methods of his operation in order to those ends; yet the transition from the faculties of our own minds to the perfections of that being who made us, from our lesser to his greater knowledge and wisdom, is *natural*, and the proof is *demonstrative*.

BUT

BUT what accessions of lustre and force does the argument receive; or rather the demonstration is endlessly repeated, when we proceed from ourselves to our fellow-creatures, and to the general œconomy and order of the creation around us. When we see multitudes of creatures in the world of the same nature and rank with ourselves, and perceive the connections of human society; when we see multitudes more of different ranks and kinds, and observe their relative order and subservience; when we observe also the various provisions made by the operations of the elements for the whole world of living creatures suitable to the nature of every kind; and finally, when we extend our view to a still larger compass, and are able to form some conception, of the relation which the earth bears to the celestial orbs, and of the proportion and connection which may subsist between one world and another; our ideas of magnificence order and beauty in nature are raised and improved; and we as-

cribe, from a more intelligent and comprehensive conviction, infinite wisdom to the Creator.

MANY indeed are unaccustomed and indisposed to enquiries of this kind; some perhaps thro' incapacity; and others thro' want of leisure; but most, thro' idleness and inattention. They are willing to be religious the easiest way: and therefore admit and believe whatever has a pious sound; without applying their minds to understand the reason and evidence on which it is founded; as if *this* was a superfluous labour.—It is indeed acknowledged, that the right culture of the heart is preferable to that of the understanding alone: yet surely it is a desirable and valuable acquisition, to apprehend clearly the evidence on which religion stands. For the more we know of the wisdom of God, the wiser we ourselves become. And *that* is the truest piety and the most solid virtue, which is built, not upon ignorance,

but upon a knowledge of the works, designs, and dispensations of infinite wisdom.

THE difficulty is, that when men first turn their attention, to contemplate the wisdom of God in the structure of the world and the oeconomy of the creatures in it, they find themselves involved in confusion and perplexity. The world appears to be a *mighty maze*: they know not how to take the proper views; what to consider first or last; how to stretch their minds to grasp the general order of the whole, or to contemplate the proportions and measures of the several parts: and their attention is more apt to be engaged by some appearances or events which seem particular and extraordinary, than by the established order and continual operations discernible in nature.—As if a person of sufficient natural capacity, but brought up in the solitude of a desert, unacquainted with human society, and the works of men, was

transported into a populous and policed country, where he beheld the various operations of men, in the culture of the earth, in building, commerce, and navigation, in the discipline of troops, the holding of councils and courts of justice; he would not be able to conceive the meaning and design of these appearances, but all would be a mysterious scene; 'till by a gradual observation or instruction, he began to understand the connections of human society, and to frame some idea of that plan of government, by which a nation is united in one body, and to perceive how the protection of law, the exertion of industry, and the several employments of men, contribute to the support and welfare of the whole.—So are we at a loss to conceive of the vast plan of the world, and the mutual relations of all the parts of nature, and how they co-operate to the ends the Creator intended.

YET

YET as every thing is a part, how small soever, of the boundless Creation; and as there is infinitely more wisdom in the works of God, than in any which men perform; so we may, with due attention, discover some evident strokes of divine art, and admirable marks of order and wise design, in those parts of nature, which lie within the narrow compass of our observation: tho' after all our study and search, there will remain infinitely more *beyond*, than *within* our comprehension; and the *whole* will ever be too vast to enter into human imagination: for *known to God*, and to him alone, *are all his works, from the beginning to the end.*

THE wisest course therefore that we can pursue, is neither on the one hand to neglect or despise the knowledge of nature, which argues ignorance and stupidity; nor on the other, attempt to explore beyond the limits of our capacity, which leads to presumption and error; but to select for

our attention such views of the creation, as are most conspicuous and intelligible, and at the same time most proper to impress on our minds, a belief and admiration of the framing and disposing wisdom of the divine Maker.

In offering you my assistance therefore to this end in a preceding discourse, we did not aim to fathom the profound depths of nature, or to disclose the hidden springs of motion, and examine the internal fabric of the world; but observed such appearances *only*, as offer themselves to our view in the general order and frame of the world:—Such as, the *Grandeur and Simplicity* apparent in the creation; these ideas being impressed on the mind by the first superficial view of the heavens and the earth:—The *Uniformity and Variety* which take place throughout the world and the creatures in it: The *Perpetual Circulations* or revolutions of the moving parts of the creation:—The *Due Proportions* of nature;
every

every part of the world being made in weight and measure proportionate to every other part and to the whole:—The *Equal Ballances* established between the opposite elements and powers of nature; by which their respective forces and operations are so adjusted that the contest subsists for ever, and a due equilibrium is always preserved; without which the world would be destroyed or become uninhabitable. We observed also, that the *like ballances* are established in the frame of human nature, between the several appetites, passions, affections, and principles belonging to it; and from this equal opposition of the several ingredients which compose our nature, the harmony of society, and the happiness, and even the safety of human life are derived.

LET us proceed finally to observe, the *Multiplicity of Effects* in nature flowing from the *same Cause*;—and the *Combination of a Multitude of Causes* to the *same Effect*.—

The

The whole process of nature is an endless series of causes and effects. As all the parts of the world have a *local* relation to and dependance on each other; so all movements and events in *time* have a dependence on the preceding causes, and a relation to the *following* effects. Tho' all things proceed from omnipotence originally; yet every thing that comes to pass in the creation is more immediately derived from subordinate causes: and in our utmost enquiries there is nothing found, which we can affirm with certainty to be done by the immediate operation of the power of God. The world is of an exquisite mechanism: the springs and powers contained in it are mostly concealed from all human search, and are too complicated to admit of our explication. It is sufficient if we understand so much of it, as to be fully convinced, that not chance, but divine art, and a wisdom surpassing our comprehension, at first erected this stupendous frame, gave motion to its various parts, and appointed

pointed the unsearchable series of events dependent on and succeeding one another. And so much knowledge is not difficult to be acquired : for tho' we cannot trace the process of nature beyond certain narrow limits ; yet we plainly see many and great effects following from causes equally apparent to human sense and knowledge.

For instance :—To how great a *variety of effects* does the *heat of the sun* sensibly contribute ? Not only to the life of numberless animals ; but to the growth of every plant ; the ripening of all kinds of grain and fruit ; the dissolving the waters ; raising the vapours ; and forming the clouds ; without which there could be no rain or dew upon the earth.—The texture of the *Air* is contrived with equal skill to answer *various* and different purposes : to sustain and refresh the bodies of animals by the lungs, and give force to the vital circulations ; to feed the glowing fire and blazing lamp ; to convey all the different sounds, with

with a quick vibration, thro' the surrounding space, to every ear; to give passage to all the winged tribes, flying from place to place; to fill the spreading sails, and give passage to mankind over the vast and otherwise *impassable* waters; to support the clouds of heaven, 'till, overcharged with moisture, they distill in rain upon the thirsty earth; to increase the light of the sun by reflection, and to prolong the day by morning and evening-twilight; to give speech to the tongue as well as hearing to the ear: these and many other beneficial effects depend upon the texture of that fluid in which we live and breathe. Is there no evidence of creative wisdom in the circumfusion of this curious and useful element around the globe, wrought of a texture too delicate for the eye to see, yet endued with a force which no other element can resist?—The *single* principle of *Gravitation*, pervading the universe, at the same time, gives solidity to the land, stability to the mountains, and fluency to the rivers;
binds

binds the ocean to its bed, and the whole earth to its orbit; maintains the due distances of the heavenly bodies; and retains every thing thro' universal nature in its proper situation.—Similar to this, is the *single* principle of *benevolence*, in the moral world: which in like manner is diffused thro' human nature, and produces, according to its different modifications, various beneficial effects: hence parental care; relative union; combination of friends; public spirit; good government of superiors; fidelity of inferiors; and it is *this* which retains every individual in his proper sphere, cements human society, and contributes to all virtuous actions, honourable pursuits, and innocent delights.—In these instances, and many others, we may observe, how one and the same general cause or spring in nature operates to numberless different effects.

—On the other hand, it is equally to be observed, how various causes *conspire* in
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producing the same effects.—As the seed sown, the disposition of the soil, the temperature of the air, the descent of rains, the warmth of the sun, and other causes, are all requisite to produce the annual harvest;—so the concurrence of a far greater number and variety of things is necessary to the support of human life; any one of which failing throughout the world, *all flesh would perish together, all mankind return again to dust.* Whether we consider the structure of the world in general, or of the human body in particular; the springs and movements in both, which are *all* necessary in conjunction to preserve life, seem to exceed enumeration or conception: and that they should continue *all co-operating* to that end for any period of years, is an astonishing effect of divine contrivance. There appears to be no element, no power, no part, or movement in the creation, which does not contribute one way or other to the production or preservation of life.—

There is also an inconceivable variety of

causes operating continually in the production of knowledge, of virtue, and of happiness in mankind. *These harvests, these richest and noblest fruits,* are not raised and brought to maturity without a vast preparation in nature. What is there in the immense compass and variety of the visible world, that does not serve to instruct, or please or amend mankind? The good of human society is evidently one end, to which all things in nature, as far as human knowledge extends, have either an immediate or distant relation and subservience. Here is the point, in which an innumerable multitude of lines, drawn from all parts of the world, appear to meet as in a center.

How should it excite the inquisitive understanding, and affect the religious temper, of every considerate person, to be convinced by ocular demonstration and sensible experience, how much the good of mankind is the object of the Creator's view!

view. To find the whole world framed and disposed, and all the elemental parts of it contending and co-operating in a perpetual motion, to please and benefit the human race!—Such inquiries and observations are not to be thought merely speculative amusements: they not only afford the greatest admiration and pleasure to an ingenuous mind; but are the very foundation of all religion. For till men are convinced of the intentions of divine wisdom and goodness in making the world and mankind, they cannot possibly have those sentiments of gratitude, esteem, and confidence, in return, which are the essence of religion: nor are they capable of receiving the *Faith*, and entering into the *spirit* of the *Gospel*. A general belief of the existence of God, of the exercise of his wisdom, and the intentions of his goodness, arising from a view and knowledge of the constitution of nature, is a necessary preparation, and the best qualification, for a *particular belief* of that constitution
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of divine wisdom and goodness revealed in the *Gospel*; by which the *present* state and life of mankind are *connected* with a *future* state and life, and by which the divine purposes in the frame of the earth and of mankind its chief inhabitants, are *carried forward* into a *new-creation* and an eternal world.

It merits our particular observation, that our blessed *Saviour*, that great *Teacher* sent from *GOD*, and who taught religion in a manner no other person ever did or could do, in his discourses and parables, not only imitates (as far as human language can imitate) the dignity and simplicity, the uniformity and variety of nature, but instructs his disciples by frequent and various *allusions* to the process of nature in the vegetable world and in the course of human life; appealing to their common knowledge and experience of the world around them: he collects images, from the sower going forth to sow; the growth of

the corn; the whitening harvest; the intermingled weeds; the separation of grain and chaff; and the repository of the garner: he bids his disciples to behold the fowls of the air; the lillies of the field; the tree putting forth its branches and leaves; the vine bringing forth fruit: he introduces the shepherd dividing his flocks, the King going forth to war, the bridegroom entertaining his friends, the master examining his servants; the thief breaking into a house; the traveller robbed and wounded on the highway, and passengers discovering him; with many other scenes and characters of vegetable and animal life: in a word, whenever he intended to convey some memorable instruction to those about him, he immediately *draws a picture* of some part of *nature*, and requires them to look upon it, and find out the meaning. — The more therefore we attend to and understand the operations of nature, we shall be the better qualified to understand and receive the instructions of the *Gospel*.

Gospel. Such is the wisdom and *philosophy* of our *holy religion*. But our minds are so corrupted, and our taste so vitiated, by the artificial inventions and *sophistry* of men, that we neglect to study, and do not enter into the natural sentiments and spirit of our divine teacher's discourses. They deserve *more* attention than any other portion even of *holy Scripture* itself; but often meet with *less* than the vainest dictates and emptiest declamations of ignorant or presumptuous men.

Thus far have I endeavoured, in several discourses, to represent such views of the creation, as are proper and sufficient to give us a full persuasion of the Creator's wisdom and goodness.—But our enquiries and observations hitherto, concerning the divine intentions in the frame of nature and government of the world, have been confined to the marks of order, beauty, and wise contrivance, and to the benevolent purposes of God, respecting

the *present* life and human society in *this* world. We have not as yet observed the evidences of a *future* state, and the provision which God hath made in order to the *eternal* life and happiness of mankind. —And indeed, for our full assurance and satisfaction in this most important and interesting point, we must have recourse to a *new theory*: we must understand the ground, the structure, the design, and the end of the *christian* revelation. *Here* is discovered the connection between *this* world and *another*, the constitution, by which men are saved at death, and raised to another life. The *Gospel* every where leads our views to, and most clearly and solidly establisheth our hopes of, *a world to come*.

It shall be my endeavour therefore, in some future discourses, to represent those evidences of the *Gospel*, which prove the intention of divine wisdom and goodness to *raise* mankind to *another* life, in order to their enjoying higher degrees of knowledge,

ledge, virtue, and happiness in a world to come, than can be attained by the constitution of this visible world. In respect to our animal nature, we are under the same law of the creation as the brute-creatures, and even the plants of the earth. *All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass.*—It is not so much from our nature then, nor from any arguments which reason alone can furnish, as from that word of GOD which abideth for ever, that we derive our hope of another life: *and this word is the gospel.* The inestimable gift of *eternal Life* is in *Christ Jesus our Lord.* This is that *Mystery* of divine wisdom and goodness, which lay hid from the foundation of the world; but is now, since the appearance of our Saviour, made manifest to us, who by him do believe in GOD, who raised him from the dead, and gave him glory; from which we derive the highest faith and hope in God, the faith and hope of a glorious immortality.

IN the mean time, we shall previously consider the evidences which prove the moral government, and rewarding *justice* of God, in the *present* state of mankind: as it is requisite to take a view of *this* subject, before we proceed to *that* of a future state.

D I S.



DISCOURSE VII.

The Marks of a Moral and Judicial Government.



In the mean time, we shall satisfy
consider the evidences which prove the
moral government, and the eternal order
of God, in the present state of existence
as it is requisite to take a view of the
state.

DISCOURSE VII.

The Marks of a Moral and Judi-
cial Government.

PSALM lvi. II.

Verily there is a GOD, that judgeth in the earth.

THE books of *holy scripture* conspire to represent the Supreme Being in the character of a *moral Governor*, and to inculcate upon the minds of men, sentiments of reverence and submission suitable to his governing justice and goodness. — God is sufficiently revealed to us in his works, as the natural Creator and preserver of all things; his wisdom, power, and beneficence appearing in every part of the visible creation: *for the invisible things of GOD, says the Apostle, are clearly seen in the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead.* — And here is the beginning
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and foundation of all religion; in that knowledge, which men may and ought to attain from the things that are made, of the all-wise Maker; that they may *worship him*, and him alone, *that made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the fountains of water*. And the evidence here is so clear and certain, that it becomes irresistible: the most obvious appearances of nature are sufficient; and in proportion as our knowledge encreases, the conviction becomes the stronger, by discovering still more, and more admirable, effects of wise contrivance and benevolent design.

BUT that God acts, not only as Creator, Former, and Preserver of all things, but as a moral Governor and judge of mankind, as the holy scriptures constantly represent him, estimating the different actions and characters of men, rewarding the righteous and punishing the wicked, in proportion to their respective deserts; this is a doctrine which hath been thought
liable,

liable, if we set aside a divine revelation, to great difficulties and objections. Many wise and good men, not only amongst the Heathens, but amongst the Jews also, seem to have laboured under great perplexity concerning it. This we may easily perceive, if we read and consider the 73d *Psalms*, the whole book of *Job*, and other parts of the *old Testament*. When they saw the innocent oppressed, the virtuous afflicted, and the ungodly prospering in the world and increasing in riches, they were confounded, and were at a loss how to reconcile these dark appearances with their notions of divine justice. — The *Psalms*, which concludes with the text, is a petition to the Almighty, that he would exert his power and justice, to curb the insolence, and break the teeth, of powerful oppressors, who wrought violence and spoke lies, and to make their punishment an example, that the righteous might rejoice, and all men say, *verily there is a God that judgeth in the earth.*

EVERY

EVERY age and nation hath afforded some examples of good men, who have suffered oppression and other terrible afflictions; of wicked men who have flourished in ease, wealth, and prosperity; of horrible crimes which passed off with impunity; and of worthy actions which met with no reward; nay, of villany being protected and rewarded, and of virtue being persecuted.——These are appearances which seem inconsistent with the perfection of a divine government. It may seem impossible to find out such a theory as will solve these difficulties, and to prove, notwithstanding such objections, that *there is verily a GOD who judgeth in the earth*; that the world is under the government of a Being *who loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity*, who wants neither power nor inclination to do perfect justice to all his creatures.

IN attempting to lay before you such a theory, to reconcile all the events of life with

with a righteous providence, and to vindicate the ways of God to men; we shall observe,

FIRST, that the general laws and constitution of nature imply the *justice*, no less than the *wisdom* of God:

SECONDLY, that in consequence hereof, *certain measures* of divine justice are in *continual execution*.

THIRDLY, that *those measures* are more extensive than men generally apprehend or believe:

FOURTHLY, that the particular instances, which appear to the contrary, are only *exceptions* to the general order of things:

FIFTHLY, that the *gospel-revelation* is abundantly sufficient to give entire satisfaction to good men, to support them under every suffering, and to raise virtue to the highest excellence and stability.

FIRST:

FIRST: the general laws and constitution of nature exhibit the *justice*, as well as the *wisdom* of God.—As there is an evident subservience of the general frame of the world to the benefit of human life, and such various provisions in nature to answer the divine intentions of producing knowledge, virtue, and happiness in mankind; as numberless proofs of wisdom and benevolence appear throughout the whole; here is the strongest presumption in favour of the divine justice: and it is most irrational to imagine, that *injustice* can find place in a plan or constitution of *so much* wisdom and goodness. For every instance of injustice implies either ignorance or malevolence, or at least a *defect* of wisdom and goodness. And therefore, all the arguments drawn from the whole frame of nature which lead us to ascribe infinite wisdom and benevolence to the Supreme Being, conclude equally for his perfect justice.

SECONDLY: in consequence of that constitution of things which his creative wisdom hath established, and which shews undeniably the goodness of his intentions; there are *certain measures* of divine justice in *continual execution*, for the punishment of vice and the encouragement of virtue.

—Here begins the moral government of God; and the marks or proofs, by attending to which, we may be convinced, that *there is verily a GOD that judgeth in the earth.*—

In a former discourse, we observed the methods of divine wisdom, for the purpose of producing and cultivating *virtue* in the world; which shew at the same time that mankind are under a divine discipline and *moral government.*—But avoiding an unreasonable repetition of the same sentiments, we shall collect some of those symptoms in nature, which most clearly shew the divine *intention* to prevent, restrain, correct, and punish *vice*, as well as to promote *virtue*; and which may establish our belief in him as a moral governor, and

consequently incite us to obey his righteous will.

THE *subordinations* of human society are appointed by the author of nature for the purposes of his governing justice.—*Civil government* is expressly denominated in *Scripture*, the ordinance of GOD, for the punishment of evil doers, as well as the protection of them that do well: it is therefore to be considered as one mean or instrument, among many others, which the wisdom of God hath provided for the execution of his justice. And tho' there is necessarily much imperfection, and sometimes much abuse, in the administration of this divine institution, *because* it is administered by frail men; yet it is certain, that the general operation and natural tendency of it, is to restrain and punish the wickedness of men, to support order and encourage virtue. For as the *Psalmist* says, *if the foundations be destroyed*, if government which is the foundation of society be overturned, *what shall*
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~~the righteous do?~~—There would then be no protection for innocence, no peace or safety for virtuous men. The punishment of malefactors in society, and the awe of human authority, is a *general effect* in nature, which discovers a moral and *judicial intention* in the Almighty Maker, who hath fitted and designed mankind for such a state.—*Domestic Government* is also an institution of nature for the restraint and correction of evil actions, as well as instruction and encouragement in virtue. And how weakly soever that most important office is sometimes discharged; the design of creative wisdom in appointing it, to answer the ends of a just government in the whole, is too evident to admit of any doubt. *Parents* bear as it were a vicegerent authority over their offspring, *delegated* to them by nature from the Supreme Governor of the world; of whose universal government over all his rational creatures, the best notion we are able to conceive, is under the *paternal* image and character.

We find our *Saviour* explaining to his disciples the nature of *the kingdom of GOD*, or of his moral government over mankind, by *allusions* to the authority of a *Prince* over his subjects, of a *Master* over his servants, and chiefly of a *Father* over his children: *The Father*, is the title constantly ascribed to God in the *New Testament*, and with a particular emphasis as *characterizing* the measures of his governing *justice* and *clemency* towards mankind.

We may further trace the footsteps of divine justice, in the natural *resentments* of mankind against the perpetrators of wicked actions; who thereby expose themselves to a general indignation or contempt: for the passions and affections of men, even of vicious men, naturally rise in favour of virtue and detestation of vice in others. And this is a considerable *provision* in nature, for the restraint and punishment of the one, and the encouragement of the other. For however wicked

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mén may avoid the penalties of human laws, or be unaccountable to human authority; yet they find themselves *loaded* with public disgrace and reproach, or at least, *feel* the loss of that reputation, esteem, and good-will, which they naturally desire from their fellow-creatures.

THERE is an order also, in the constitution of the human body, for the punishment of some vices. As those crimes which are most injurious to society are generally punished, by the public resentments of that society which they injure; so those vices that are of a personal nature find their own punishment nearer home. It is almost impossible to persist in any bodily excesses, without suffering the penalties naturally annexed to them in the frame of the human body; diseases, and often death itself.

AND finally, there is the most certain and effectual provision of nature, for the

punishment of wickedness and the reward of virtue, in the frame of the human mind.—There is as it were a *Tribunal of justice* erected in every man's own heart, where conscience sits as judge, to whose approving or condemning sentence men are continually exposed, and most of all in the seasons of retirement and reflection. And however men may attempt to silence this internal monitor, to deceive or corrupt this impartial judge, or to harden themselves against the dread of this vicegerent of divine justice, it seems hardly possible either to suppress it entirely, or to become indifferent to its opinion and censure.

To this we may add, that the passions of envy, malice, revenge, ambition, and covetousness are naturally tormenting to the mind; they bring in some measure their own punishment along with them.

SUCH are the *various orders* and regulations, which the wisdom of God hath established

tablished in nature, for the *ends* of his *justice*: which I barely mention, as they are sufficient to prove beyond contradiction, that mankind are under a moral and judicial government; and are not only the *creatures* of divine power, and *objects* of his providence and goodness, but also *subjects* of his governing justice.

THIRDLY: these measures of divine justice are more extensive than men generally apprehend or believe:—They operate in more instances, and to a greater degree of punishment, than we are apt to imagine.—The stings of conscience are often keen and piercing to the inmost soul: the passions of vice are corroding, and destroy mental quiet and repose: the resentments of society, the disaffection of friends and relatives, are galling to the heart: the terror of human laws is grievous and burdensome: and infamy, disease, and death, the frequent effects of debauchery and villany, cannot be thought

slight punishments. Now tho' wicked persons may avoid some of these punishments; yet it is hardly possible that any criminal in the world can escape them all. The all-wise governor of the world has various methods of chastizing and punishing his offending creatures: he can convert any thing into an instrument of his justice, and make the sinner to taste the bitterness of sin, and to feel the stripes of his displeasure, in methods *imperceptible* to others. It is indeed the *mind alone* that is capable of punishment: and in what degree the sinner's mind suffers, is only known to God and himself. However, the measures we have already observed, by which divine justice operates, are so visible and so frequent, that no one is the least surprized at the effect. When intemperance and lewdness bring diseases; when base actions are covered with shame and infamy; when villany suffers by law; when conscious guilt produces inward confusion, remorse and anguish; and on the other hand, when
men

men of sobriety, probity, and beneficence, enjoy health, safety, and reputation, the approbation of their own minds, and the friendship of other men; — there is no occasion of wonder and astonishment in all this, because it is no more than the usual and natural course of things.

How comes it to pass then, that the conduct of providence is thought so dark and intricate; and that men have so little confidence in the divine justice, that they are ready to imagine the world to be in a state of confusion, or under a strange dispensation of government, in which vice is unpunished and virtue unrewarded; and are tempted to doubt, whether *there is a GOD that judgeth in the earth?*—This principally arises, not from the *actual ways* of providence, but from *men's* foolish *misapprehensions*, and their wrong ways of thinking and judging of this subject. They look for the justice of God's providence, *where it is not to be found*, and where they ought not to

expect to find it; and *overlook* it, *where* it most plainly and certainly *appears*. They look for it in the singular, extraordinary, and marvellous events of life, in the strange and sudden calamities or deaths of particular persons, or in tempests and whirlwinds, in thunder and lightning, in famines, pestilences, and earthquakes.— But in such events the justice of God *veils itself* from all human knowledge: these are the mysterious ways of providence, and *the judgments past finding out*: and it is folly and presumption in men, to pretend to explain the particular purposes, which they are intended to serve. Yet *weak* men have always been ready to imagine that they *saw* most clearly, in such events, the *band* of God's justice lifted up against the wickedness of men, which they never *did*, nor *could see*. Our *Blessed Saviour* hath expressly taught us, not to look upon such events as instances of God's vengeance inflicted on the unhappy sufferers. *Suppose ye*, says he to his disciples, *that the eighteen men upon whom*

whom the tower of Siloam fell, or the Galileans whom Pilate surprized and massacred as they were offering sacrifice, were sinners above others?—I tell you, Nay.—And when they asked him concerning the blind man, did this man sin, or his parents, that he was born blind? He replied, Neither.—

ON the other hand, where the justice of God's Providence is most *evidently to be seen*, there men are most apt to overlook it; in the regular and usual course of things, by which wickedness draws its own punishment after it, infamy, diseases, cares, fears, perplexities, the weight of human resentments, or the burden of a troubled conscience, nay often terminates in death, or the utter loss of all that is dear in life.—But here it is that the *band of God* and the *rod of his justice appear*, pointing at the wickedness of men, and chastizing or punishing them for it. Here we are least liable to mistake, and may discern the divine intention with the greatest clearness of
evi-

evidence. And why?—*Because* these events follow in the *natural course* of things. Here are the orders which the wisdom of God hath provided and established in the constitution of the world, for the execution of his justice, *for the punishment of evil-doers, for the encouragement of them that do well*, and for instruction and admonition to all.—Every wise and considerate person will observe the *natural* consequences of vice and sin, and of virtue and piety, in the world, and *in them* expect to find marks of divine justice, and of that moral discipline and government, under which mankind are placed by the wise providence of God. But weak and inconsiderate minds are never affected but with *strange* and *uncommon* appearances, which *startle* and *terrify* them into religion: and all their belief of God's justice is founded upon events which seem *marvellous*, and *contrary* to the common course of things, They can hardly form a notion of that most wise, gentle, and humane procedure
of

of divine justice, perfectly adapted to a state of trial, and to the circumstances of mankind; by which vice in its progress is gradually restrained and corrected, and the sinners final ruin is mercifully delayed; that he may take warning by his own experience or the sufferings of others, and by amendment escape destruction.

IF the thunderbolt should immediately strike the criminal dead, if the earth should open and swallow up the blasphemer; this might appear to some a most proper display and *signal proof* of God's justice; as it could not fail to astonish men, and strike them with horror: and they would then conclude that *verily there is a GOD that judgeth in the earth.*—Or if good men were miraculously restored to health, or raised in a sudden and unaccountable manner to grandeur and affluence; this might appear an illustrious and engaging evidence of the divine regard to virtue and piety.—But all this is nothing else, than contriving in
our

our own imaginations a scheme of government agreeable to human prejudice, passion, and folly; instead of studying to learn the rectitude and excellence of that government, which the infinite wisdom of God hath actually established in nature.

VICE is not unpunished, neither is virtue left destitute of support and encouragement, in this life: and the more accurately we inquire into the real state of things, the more certain evidence we shall find of a divine justice distinguishing the different actions and dispositions of men. It is our want of attention that hinders us from discerning that evidence; and still more, our vanity and selfishness and mistaken judgment of the virtues and vices both of ourselves and others; and most of all, our worldly prejudices in being so much blinded and prepossessed with the external circumstances of men; as if riches were a mark of divine favour, and the best reward of virtue; and poverty such an evil as providence

dence cannot compensate. And this is a prejudice that lies uppermost in the minds of many; who can hardly conceive how it is consistent with a just providence to bestow the riches and possessions of this world in so indiscriminate a manner, that bad men may as easily obtain a share as good men.—But this is no difficulty with a truly wise and virtuous man, who makes a right estimate of things, and very plainly perceives, that external wealth is a circumstance of little moment, in determining men's happiness; and therefore is not struck with *envy* when he sees the prosperity of foolish and wicked men.—Indeed as riches are *no sign* of God's favour; so such envy and high admiration of them are a very *bad sign* of a man's merit: and to make such an objection against God's providence, concludes nothing but our own want of virtue and eager desire of wealth.

FROM

FROM these several causes it proceeds, that men judge *partially* of the ways of providence: whilst the real marks of a distinguishing justice are slighted and overlooked; and the difficulties and objections on the other hand are exceedingly *magnified*. The internal peace and pleasure which arise from innocence and conscious virtue are little esteemed or considered; nor are the troubles and pains, which ensue from guilt in the natural course of things, much regarded, *as proofs of divine justice*.—As the *Pharisees* demanded of our Saviour a *sign from heaven*; so we want to see something *amazing* and stupendous, or at least some external *show* and glare; and are not content with that silent internal process of justice, by which the mind of man is instructed, persuaded and admonished, the vicious made to undergo various sufferings, and the virtuous supported with courage and hope.

FROM

BUT

BUT it is in the *internal frame* of human nature, not in the *external fabric* and events of the world, that we are to discover a providence distinguishing the different actions and characters of men. The world and the elements of it were fitted for the habitation and support of mankind in general, of the good and bad equally: and, as our *Saviour* observes, *GOD causeth his sun to shine and his rain to descend on the just and the unjust*, without distinction: and in like manner those calamities and desolations which proceed from any violence or disorder of the elements, fall on mankind indiscriminately, without any regard to their guilt or their innocence.—It is not therefore in such events that the divine justice makes itself apparent to us. But if we look within, and attend to a train of operations and events of another kind, we may observe a *distinction* evidently *designed* by the providence of God, and a regard shewn to the different actions of men. For it never can be said or thought,

that

that good and bad men, the best and the worst, are *equally* liable to the remorse of a troubled conscience, to the penalties of human laws, to infamy and contempt, and the abject slavery to which the habits of vice reduce men; or that they *equally* enjoy peace and pleasure of mind, and satisfaction in society, which is the consequence of a wise and worthy behaviour. No one can hesitate in determining, whether a virtuous or vicious conduct, whether piety, probity, and temperance, or profligacy and villany, be upon the whole a better foundation for the happy enjoyment of life. For however men may in particular instances, and when a temptation urges, determine wrong *for themselves*; yet in regard to *others*, and where they judge most *impartially*, no man living has the *least doubt*.

HERE then the providence of God plainly turns the scale of human life in favour of virtue and piety; and his distinguishing

gushing justice appears as evident, as the sun in the firmament: and whatever interposing objects may eclipse its lustre, or clouds arise to intercept our view and occasion a transient darkness, it remains an established truth, that *verily there is a GOD that judgeth in the earth.* And the proof lies not in particular and extraordinary signs and appearances, but in the general order and constitution of the moral world, and the effects continually resulting from it; in like manner as the creative wisdom of God appears in the general frame and constitution of the material world.

HAVING thus far endeavoured to fix our belief of the governing justice and providence of God, upon its own proper and natural foundation of evidence, in the general order and disposition of the rational world; we may observe, *fourthly*, that the particular instances which appear to the contrary are but *exceptions* to that general order established in nature. — For tho'

such instances are not near so frequent and considerable, as the prejudices of men are apt to imagine and represent them; yet it cannot be denied, that there are affecting examples of good men enduring such trials and miseries, as we cannot imagine are any way compensated in this life: and of wicked men who escape with impunity, and seem too powerful, or too hardened, to be affected by the ordinary course of divine providence, and even to triumph over all justice human and divine.—Such appearances in the *moral* world are, like *unusual* disorders in the *material* elements, *exceptions* to the general order and process of nature: and the wisdom of divine providence does not see fit to interpose in a special and miraculous manner to prevent the one or the other.—In regard to such particular events, we may and ought to remain satisfied with the general evidence of wisdom and justice in the whole. The constitution and laws of the material and spiritual world were framed, not for individuals,

viduals, but for mankind collectively: and if we are able to discern a divine wisdom and rectitude in the general orders of nature; some apparent deviations or exceptions should have little weight in the opposite scale, to affect and alter our judgment. Human ignorance is a reasonable and sufficient answer to such objections: since we are as little capable of fully comprehending the reasons or ends of every dispensation in the moral government of God, as of the construction and design of every part of the visible creation: and in respect to *both*, we cannot have too low and mean an opinion of our own knowledge and understanding, in comparison of the unsearchable wisdom of the Supreme Maker and Governor of the world.

BUT there are notwithstanding some considerations, which if we can enter into them, will cast a *light* upon the providence of God, and *dissipate* in some measure those *thick clouds*, which seem to surround

the throne of his justice.—It will easily be allowed by all who have any sense of the excellence of virtue, that to produce virtue in the hearts and lives of men, is an end most worthy of the wisdom and providence of God; and that ~~those~~ these are the best measures of government, which are best adapted to this end. And we have great reason to believe, that it is in order to this end, that the providence of God so frequently appoints afflictions and persecutions to good men.—Adversity is often the school of wisdom; poverty the soil producing the richest virtue; and the lowest state of suffering the scale of ascending to the noblest height of piety and goodness.—Are opulence and ease the proper rewards of virtue, which are so often found to enfeeble and corrupt it?—Are the hopes of external possessions and preferments, or the fears of poverty and loss, the proper motives of piety and goodness?—Are men to be honest and charitable, through mere *selfishness*, and give, only to receive back

back what they gave with interest. *What is that virtue worth, which springs merely from a regard to our temporal interest; and is founded on the narrow views of immediate reward or punishment?—What kind of piety is that, which demands present pay, and dares not trust the Supreme justice of God to a future account?—The most solid virtue and genuine piety is surely that, which, moved by no worldly consideration, acts from the principles of honour and conscience, and a steady confidence in the governing justice and goodness of Almighty God; that, which despises the allurements of wealth and ease, and rises superior to difficulties and dangers; that, which is tried in the furnace of affliction, and when tried comes forth as gold.—But if the government of the world was moulded according to the vain fancies and desires of men, and their narrow notions of justice and equity; if temporal rewards and punishments were immediately dispensed according to the different ac-*

tions of men; this constitution, instead of promoting, would destroy religion and virtue: there would be no room for the exercise of faith and trust in God, of steadfast integrity and disinterested goodness, of fortitude, patience, charity, or any kind of honourable and exemplary virtue: mankind would then be governed like the brute-creatures, by their immediate appetites and passions, not by reason, conscience, or the *faith of religion*: this world would be no longer a state of trial, discipline and education; and the highest ends we can ascribe to the wisdom of God in creating mankind would be defeated.

THE tyranny and persecution which have raged in the world for a succession of ages, by which the best of men have been the most inhumanly treated, and they, who have paid the sincerest regard to religion and conscience, have met with all sorts of indignity, reproach, oppression, and the cruellest deaths; present the darkest scene
that

that ever was beheld in the world, in respect to the providence and justice of the Supreme Governor. But these persecutions were the means of trying and exercising the probity and piety of numbers of men, and of producing the noblest harvest of genuine virtue. It may be reasonably thought, that it was in order to this end, Divine Providence permitted such an amazing tyranny to rise, prevail, and continue so long, *waging war against the Saints of the Most High*, and spreading terror and devastation in the earth. In this view the *holy Scriptures* teach us to look upon such scenes, and thus to reconcile them with the justice of an over-ruling Providence.

BUT *such* virtue and religion, in *so great* numbers, who resigned all the possessions of this world, exposed themselves to miseries most terrible to human nature, and accounted their own lives of no price, to retain their integrity, in firm reliance on the final justice and goodness of the Al-

mighty Governor of the world; — such virtue and religion was never found but among christians; nor can ever spring from any principle in the human mind, but the Faith of the Gospel, the earnest belief of a future life and the rewards of immortality. — For it is evident that such piety and virtue hath not its reward in this life. And tho' the Providence of God makes such a general distinction between good and evil men, as is sufficient to establish our belief of his justice, and to support the practice of virtue in all ordinary cases, yet a provision is requisite for cases of extraordinary difficulty and distress. The highest and most excellent degrees of virtue and piety (as appears in the instance we have now in our view) are not recompenced in this life. — To vindicate therefore the perfect justice of the Divine government, to give proper consolation to the minds of good men, and to raise virtue to the highest excellence and stability; recourse must be had to the doctrine of a future Life: and

and in this point (which was my last observation) the *Gospel-revelation* is abundantly sufficient to give entire satisfaction, and to support all good men under the severest trials.

DISCOURSE VIII.

The Moral Evidence of a Future State.

ROM. II. 16.



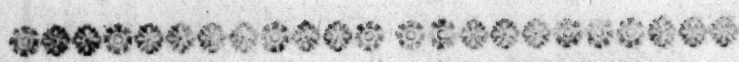
*In the day when GOD will judge the secrets
of men by Jesus Christ, according to my
Gospel.*

DISCOURSE VIII.

The Moral Evidence of a Future State.



ending discourse: and the summary ac-
count is, That the justice of God estab-
lishing the different actions of men ap-
pears, not in a distribution of worldly
prosperity, or of any external advantages
or calamities; but chiefly in those internal



DISCOURSE VIII.

The Moral Evidence of a Future
State.



injustice or satisfaction which relate to
natural consequence from the temper and
conduct.

ROM. ii. 16.

*In the day when GOD will judge the secrets
of men by Jesus Christ, according to my
Gospel.*

THE evidence of a moral govern-
ment, and the measures of divine
justice which are in continual execution,
for the restraint and correction of vice, and
for the encouragement of virtue and piety
in this life, have been observed in the pre-
ceding discourse: and the summary ac-
count is, That the justice of God distin-
guishing the different actions of men ap-
pears, not in a distribution of worldly
possessions, or of any external advantages
or calamities; but chiefly in those internal

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sufferings or satisfactions which result by natural consequence from the temper and conduct.

DOMESTIC and civil government are indeed *ordinances* of GOD for the restraint of vice and protection of virtue, which bespeak upon the whole the *governing design* of the author of nature, who fitted mankind for such a state of society. But the authority and judgment of *conscience* within the mind itself, approving right, and condemning wrong conduct, both of ourselves and others, is a direct and certain proof of a judicial intention in that Being, whose wisdom established the constitution of the rational mind, as well as the frame of the animal body and the fabric of the material world. For the make of the mind is such, that guilt produces remorse, anxiety, fear, shame, and many painful emotions; but innocence and virtue are attended with tranquillity, comfort, hope, and many pleasing affections. So that without having

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ing recourse to the frequent instances of wicked men, ruining their health, wasting their substance, pining with envy or avarice, or exposing themselves to the sword of human justice, and thus eating the bitter fruits of their own doings, and being filled with their own devices; the natural influence of conscience is sufficient of itself, to turn the ballance on the side of innocence and probity, and to shew, that wicked practices serve in general, not to increase, but to diminish the happy enjoyment of life.

HERE then lies the main evidence of the governing intentions of the Supreme Maker of the world; and not in external accidents and events: for in this respect, as Solomon observes, *there are the same events to the righteous and to the wicked, as is the good so is the sinner, and he that sweareth as he that feareth an oath*: poverty, bodily pains and calamities seem equally incident to men of both characters: nor do famines, pestilences, earthquakes, or other public devastations

distinctions, distinguish the different qualities of men, or pay the least regard to their guilt or innocence: *because* the all-wise Creator, in framing the elements, had a view to the state of his creatures collectively: and as far as they are framed for the safety and benefit of mankind, *this* goodness he designed to extend *equally* to the just and the unjust. And therefore the providence of God doth not appear to distinguish the qualities of men in such events of the world. This must be allowed, if we would not be guilty of speaking *deceitfully* for God, and attempting to vindicate his justice by suppositions contrary to common experience. — This was the error of *Job's* friends, who in their debating with him, and reasoning upon this great subject, the justice of God's Providence, maintain confidently, that Divine Providence doth reward and punish men according to their deserts, in this life, and even in their external and bodily circumstances: and therefore seeing him reduced

to such a miserable situation, they peremptorily pronounce him guilty, and accuse him in the bitterest terms of hypocrisy and secret wickedness. To which he replies, by protesting his own innocence and integrity, asserting that the providence of God doth not distinguish good and bad men by their outward condition, and charging them with misrepresenting the actual state of things, and *pleading for GOD deceitfully*; or defending his justice by false suppositions. And we find, in the conclusion of the book, that when the poet introduces the Almighty to end the debate, he first silences *Job's* complaints, by shewing him his great ignorance of that unsearchable wisdom, which established the various parts of the creation, and formed the different species of living creatures; and finally reproves with indignation those friends of *Job*, *who had not spoke of his providence the thing that was right as his servant Job had done.*

But beside those external calamities to which men of all characters are equally liable; there have been numerous examples of good men, who have suffered the most grievous oppressions, from the power and tyranny of wicked men, on the very account of their piety and integrity. This conduct of Providence, in permitting the best of men to fall under the dominion, and to bear the injustice and cruelty, of the worst, even to the extremities of disgrace, pain and death; may be thought an appearance the most inexplicable, and irreconcilable to our ideas of governing justice. For however such hard trials may serve to exercise and improve the virtue, and exalt the piety, of the sufferers, and render them exemplary to others; yet *exclusive* of another life, such virtue neither appears to meet with any adequate recompence, nor scarcely to answer any purpose of wisdom and goodness: and nothing can seem more *inconsistent* with a wise and just government, than to favour *lower* degrees

gress of virtue with the peaceable and comfortable enjoyment of life, and at the same time permit the *highest* degrees of it, not only to pass unrewarded, but to be punished with misery and destruction. To resign the ease and advantages of life, to withstand the terrors of pain and death, rather than depart from the rules of integrity, is apparently the noblest degree of virtue human nature is capable of practising: and to do this, upon a principle of confidence in the divine justice and goodness, is surely a conduct most acceptable to the Supreme Being, if any actions of men can be so.

CAN it then be believed, that the same all-wise, all-powerful and best of Beings, who throughout universal nature does *nothing in vain*, who provides for the wants and desires of the brute-creatures, who gratifies in a various and wonderful manner the bodily appetites of all mankind; that He hath made *such virtue in vain*, and mocks the best desires of the best of men;

and hath so ordered, that the more absolutely men *confide* in his wisdom and goodness, the more miserably they shall be *disappointed*? Can it be imagined, that the same providence, which doth not produce a harvest of grain, but to answer a beneficent end, and which hath a *meaning* in the minutest productions of nature; yet produceth this most valuable *moral harvest* for nothing but *destruction*, and hath *no meaning* in thus cultivating and raising the virtue of men? Especially when we consider, that the root and principle of such virtue is a *Faith in GOD*; a trust in his rewarding justice, and hope of another life? Is it not a contradiction to admit, that the truest piety is that which springs from error and delusion; that the noblest virtue is that which terminates in the worst effects? — If this appears inconsistent with that administration of a just government, and with those designs of infinite wisdom and goodness, which are discovered in the general frame and constitution of the

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the world and of human nature; we are hence led to believe a future state upon a natural foundation of probability: *not* because there are *no effects* of God's justice experienced at present; but because, on the *contrary*, there are measures of divine *justice* as well as wisdom, which are *commenced*, and are in *continual execution* in this life and world, which at the same time do not appear to be *finished* here, but to extend further; and which seem most defective in the most important events and signal actions of life.

PUBLIC calamities involve good and bad men *equally* in a common ruin. And tho' in the usual course of human life, the inferior and more ordinary degrees of vice and virtue meet with some proportionable degrees of punishment and reward, in the ordinary measures of a just providence, and by the very constitution of human nature; yet the most compleat and *hardened wickedness*, and the most eminent and *steady virtue*, seem *not* to

be comprehended in *those measures*, but to remain *unprovided* for, in the *present* plan and administration of Divine Providence. Men by the very *excess* of wickedness get above the power of conscience, the sense of shame, and the fear of human resentments; and so escape those punishments which are intended to correct and restrain the lesser degrees of vice and folly: They are reserved therefore to another world, and *the Spirit of GOD ceaseth to strive with them*; but *after the hardness of their hearts they treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of GOD*. And on the other hand, men often *lose*, even the usual advantages of virtue in this life, and sometimes life itself, by their *uncommon* fidelity and virtue: and therefore their reward is *not in this world, but in another*.

Thus we have endeavoured to shew the natural evidence of the moral government of God, or of his rewarding justice and good.

goodness, as it appears in the present actual state of things, and as it leads to the *Faith of the Gospel*.

By the *Gospel* I mean, what the *Apostle* defineth as *his Gospel* in the text, and what all the writers of the *New Testament* mean by it, viz. The doctrine of another life, and of the rewards of divine justice and goodness in it, dispensed by our *Saviour*; and by the *Faith of the Gospel*, the belief of this doctrine.—

IN reviewing the context we shall easily perceive what the *Apostle* declares to be *his Gospel*.—*GOD* will render to every man according to his works;—This expression asserts the moral government and justice of *GOD*:—to them, who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory, honour, and immortality; eternal Life:—This asserts, that the measures of divine justice and goodness extend beyond this life, and that immortality will be the reward of that virtue which

is founded on faith in God and the hope of another life.—In what follows he asserts an appointment of punishments also to the vicious and impenitent; and that this distribution of rewards and punishments will be made to all mankind in the most impartial manner, without the least respect to names and professions: and finally, that the administration or execution of the divine justice and goodness in a life to come, is committed to our Blessed Saviour;—*In the day, or at the time, when GOD will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my Gospel.*

Now this *Gospel* hath been variously known and believed, or unknown, disregarded or rejected, and consequently has had more or less influence, in all ages from the beginning of the world. For the *Faith* of the *Gospel* was in the world, in *some degree*, before the coming of our Saviour.—Let it not seem strange that I assert this; because our Saviour and his *A-*
postles

postles assert the same. The patriarch *Abraham* was instructed in the Gospel, as our *Apostle* asserts, Gal. 3. And he believed it: *he believed GOD, and it was accounted unto him for righteousness.* That is, He acted upon a confidence in the rewarding justice and goodness of God in another life, and was therefore acceptable to him. He had also some information of that great descendant from himself, by whom this eternal Salvation was to be accomplished: *he longed, saith our Saviour, (for so it should be translated) to see my day; he saw it, and was glad.*—The writer to the *Hebrews* shews throughout the eleventh Chapter, how the most celebrated persons of the *Jewish* antiquity, acted upon the *like faith*, and were animated in virtue by the expectation of *a life to come.* And he defines the *Faith* of the Gospel to be *the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen:* That is, the firm belief, founded on sufficient evidence, of a life invisible and eternal.—The *Apostle Peter*, placing *this life* and

and the future life in contrast, says, *All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man the flower of grass; the grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth: that is, the animal nature of man, as inhabitant of the earth, is so far akin, not only to the brute-creatures, but even to the plants and grass of the earth, that, by the law and constitution of his nature, he must decay and perish like them:—but the word of the Lord endureth for ever; and this is that word which by the Gospel is preached unto you: that is, the discovery and assurance of an immortal life is the Gospel.*—The *Apostle John* sums up the whole Gospel in two points: *that GOD gives eternal life to men, and that this life is in his Son.* And in the beginning of his first epistle he says, *We declare what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have viewed, what we have handled of the word of life:* referring to that experimental proof the *Apostles* had of another life, by seeing with their own eyes, viewing at their leisure,

sure, and even handling our *Blessed Saviour* after his resurrection. For he adds, *The life, that is, the life to come, was discovered, and we saw it, and bear witness of it, and declare to you, that eternal life, which was with the Father, and which is now revealed to us.*—And to return to our *Apostle*, in the xvth chapter of his first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, he reminds them of, and declares what *that Gospel* is, which he had before preached to them:—*Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you, the Gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand: by which ye are also saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.* And we find throughout the whole chapter, that it was the doctrine of a future life, founded on the Resurrection of our *Saviour* from the dead.

FROM all these passages we may clearly understand what the *Gospel* is. It lies in a short compass, and nothing is more intelligible.

ligible.—The whole history of the discourses and actions of our *Saviour* and of his *Apostles*, and their reasonings, replies, confutations of objections, and precepts of duty, are all calculated to support the belief, and to direct the influence of *this Gospel* against the prejudices of *Jews* and *Heathens*.—And it is of importance to distinguish the *Gospel itself*, from the train of circumstances, events, discourses, arguments, assertions, and instructions, which are recorded in the *New Testament*, in *proof* and *defence* of *this Gospel*, and to promote its spread and influence. From a want of making this just and *important distinction*, much controversy, mistake, and confusion have arisen amongst Christians concerning the *Gospel*; or concerning the peculiar and fundamental doctrines of *Christianity*; which have been strangely multiplied and confounded in the imaginations of men.—But the whole may be summed up in a few words: that God will assuredly raise mankind to another life, and judge them according

according to their actions, by *Christ our Saviour*, whom he hath appointed to that end, *whereof he hath given us an assurance by raising him from the dead.*—This summary of *Christian Faith* is given by our *Apostle* in his speech to the *Athenian* court. The Almighty Maker and Father of mankind, pursuant to the designs of his creative wisdom and the measures of his governing justice and goodness, not intending that mankind should perish at death, hath employed and appointed our *Blessed Saviour*, as the great administrator of his moral government, to raise from the dead and to judge mankind, and to confer immortality on all who shall be found qualified for such divine favour.—Here is in one clear and single view, the glorious *Gospel of our Salvation*, the sublime and joyful tidings, most worthy of our grateful acceptance. To confirm *this Gospel*, and give it its proper influence on the hearts and lives of men, is the whole scope of all the arguments

ments and instructions delivered in the writings of the *New Testament*.

THE *Jews* in general before the coming of our Saviour, and the *Heathens* also, had some apprehensions and belief of a future state. But it is remarkable, that in all the books of the *Old Testament* there is little or nothing said clearly and expressly concerning it. The grand discovery seems to have been reserved for that eminent person, who is the *Author and Finisher of our Faith*, who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light, and who is himself the resurrection and the life. And from that time, the belief of another life has prevailed, and had an influence in a manner and degree, which it never had before. The seed of the *Gospel* hath sprung up and produced a harvest of genuine virtue and piety: multitudes having actually maintained integrity and a good conscience, against all the allurements of this life and

the terrors of death, in confidence of a life to come.

It is no part of our design in these discourses to derogate from natural religion, or to advance the *Christian revelation* to the disparagement of the light of nature, but to shew the extent and excellence of both in conjunction, considering one as the foundation, and the other as the superstructure; and to observe where the superstructure begins, that we may know the value of the *Gospel* and the dignity of our *Christian Faith*, as built upon, and rising superior to, the *Faith of natural religion*.

WE shall therefore in the following discourses more particularly consider the natural evidences of a future state; and how they are confirmed by the *Christian-revelation*.

the terrors of death in confidence of a
life to come.

It is no part of our design in this dis-
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ferior to, the Faith of natural religion, &c.
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course more particularly consider the na-
tural evidence of a future state, and how
they are confirmed by the Christian evi-
dence. *First* we shall consider the
evidence of a future state, and how
they are confirmed by the Christian evi-
dence.



DISCOURSE IX.

The Natural Credibility of a Future State,



VOL. I.

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DISCOURSE IX.

The Natural Credibility of a Free
State.

ACTS xxvi. 8.

Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that GOD should raise the dead?

IN order to establish our minds in the sublime faith and hope of a life to come and a state of immortality, on the surest and largest foundations; it is requisite to raise and enlarge, as much as possible, our apprehensions of the grandeur and excellence of the works and designs of Almighty God.

BEFORE the breath of life inspired our first progenitor, before the mountains were brought forth, or the soil of the earth was formed, before the rivers flowed, and the

ocean filled the spacious cavities of the earth, *from everlasting there was GOD*; the first and only potentate, who holds immortality, life, and existence, in himself; who is all, yet separate from all; who pervades and supports every thing; who connects the remotest parts of eternity and immensity; who is the life of all that live, the existence of whatsoever exists; whose wisdom, goodness, and power were without a beginning, the same in the past eternity, and will be the same without end.

IN revolving backwards the interminable series of ages past, before this world was made, can we ever come to a period when there were no creatures existing, nothing but the sole self-sufficient deity? Were there not always worlds and systems without number, peopled with myriads of intelligent beings, beholding the glory and rejoicing in the goodness of their Creator? Could infinite wisdom ever exist with no designs in execution? Could Almighty
power

power ever lye dormant and inactive? Could exuberant goodness ever be barren and unprofitable? and the fountain of all life and good send forth no stream of beneficence?—Were we capable of inspecting the *archives* of heaven and reading the *Volumes of eternal history*; how would the vast operations and revolutions in numberless systems of being, which never reached the eyes or ears of mortals, and which the tongue of *Angels* is not able to relate, teach us to conceive of the fulness of deity, and amplify our ideas of the power, wisdom, and goodness of God! When we lift up our eyes to the heavens, and view the sublime regions of the worlds above, we behold something of the glory of God: the scene is indeed vast and magnificent beyond the stretch of human imagination: in contemplating, which we wonder with a childish ignorance and incapacity; we guess a *little*, understand *less*, and fully comprehend *nothing*. Yet this prospect, tho' inconceivably great, is but a *little scene*,

in comparison of what hath been, is now, and ever shall be, in boundless ages and spaces. The works of Almighty God are now, ever were, and ever will be, *adequate* to the inexhaustible plenitude and absolute perfection of his own nature,

BUT if the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of deity, never were, in any age of past eternity, inactive or unbeneficent; it follows, that there may be exalted spirits now existing in a glorious state, who are *not of yesterday* like *ourselves*; but who have been from millions of ages, and who may not be able themselves to trace back their own existence, thro' so vast antiquity, to the remote beginning; who nevertheless may at first have inhabited a world, and animated bodies similar to our own; and having acquired virtue and passed the trials of life and death, became the proper objects of divine favour, and arose to glory and immortality.—What shall be, may have been: what hath been, may be hereafter

after. And no angel, no created spirit, but God alone knows all his own works and designs from everlasting to everlasting.

INCONCEIVABLE revolutions have taken effect in remote ages. One world or system hath still succeeded to the ruin of a former, before this world had a beginning. And how great and wondrous was the change, when from the decay and dissolution of an old world this new world was raised!—when the spirit of GOD first moved the enormous confused mass, separated the elements, and disposed every part to its proper place:—when GOD said, *let there be light*; and light shone upon the dark surface of the earth:—*Let there be living creatures to replenish the earth*; and they were:—*Let man be made*; and man was made in the image of GOD, bearing, in his spiritual nature, some similitude of the infinite eternal spirit, who made him.

IF such and so great and astonishing the effects of divine power and goodness in ages past; why shall not *equal* events come to pass hereafter?—*Why should it be thought incredible that GOD should raise the dead?*—When we consider, *that power*, which commanded the light to exist, gave form and motion to the vast orbs of heaven, and life to every living creature;—*that wisdom*, which by unknown springs directs all the revolutions of the material system, and by invisible chains connects the remotest parts of the visible creation, and forms the bodies and souls of men with unsearchable skill;—*that goodness*, which is the source of all joy and happiness, which hath given the earth to the sons of men for their present use and pleasure, and makes earth and heaven conspire to their support and delight;—what effects may not be expected in ages to come and worlds invisible, from such unlimited power, wisdom, and goodness?—

AFTER

AFTER appealing to the primæval revolutions of remote antiquity, and arguing from the original formation of *this visible* world for the credibility of another *invisible*; let us consult the *present* appearances and operations in nature: and if we can find any, which are equal or *similar* to a *resurrection of the dead*; this may remove difficulties, and facilitate our belief of that important doctrine.

THE rise of every successive generation of men upon the earth, may be termed, not improperly, a continual *resurrection of human nature*.—We believe without any doubt; that multitudes of men shall be produced into life, and inhabit the earth in ages to come; tho' they are, at present, not only *invisible*, but *not in existence*. It is but a short period since the present generation came into being; since the creative omnipotent power of God raised us from nothing, to enjoy the present life, and see the light of his glorious works.

And

And is He not every moment producing human souls into being and life, to replenish the loss of those who are removed from the earth?—And certainly the continual production of souls *from non-existence into this life and world*, is a divine operation *similar and equipollent* to the raising them *from death to another life and world*.

LET us observe the revolutions of the heavenly bodies, when they seem to descend into the *infernal* regions, yet *rise again* at their appointed period.—Let us attend to the declining season of the year, and the following *resurrection* of the spring. The trees of the forest drop their leaves: every plant languishes and sickens: and the cold hand of winter benumbs and *deadens* the vegetable world: 'till the appointed period of the revolving year arrives: and then, how is the face of the earth renewed; and all the vegetable tribes receive *fresh life*, at the return of the great fountain of vital heat.—If God hath given to the sun

such *reviving power* over the plants of the earth; how much more may his own most glorious power *restore life* to the decaying and dying generations of men?

LET us mark the diminutive creatures which at first subsist in a torpid state scarce half-alive, then with active limbs traverse the clods of earth; then seem to die, yet *revive*, and with new acquired wings mount up into the airy regions.

LET us examine the dissolving bodies upon the earth, and trace the separated parts thro' the several changes and migrations; and we shall find that not an atom perishes, that every particle still subsists, and has only *changed* its place and form. If then the minutest parts of dead matter are still preserved and never annihilated; is not the sensitive intelligent soul of man more worthy of preservation?—And may it not subsist after death, tho' in a different manner and state, and with an accession
of

of new faculties?—Or shall the *soul alone*, that particle of divine breath, that living image of the ever-living spirit of God, *perish*, whilst every part of the body remains in being, tho' so much changed in situation and form?

FINALLY, let us consider, how *sleep*, that *image of death*, pervades the human frame; and in soft yet strong chains binds up the soul of man, and suspends its faculties; yet in a moment, *in the twinkling of an eye*, the bands are burst, and the *soul rises* to wakeful and active life.—May not the bands of death be loosed in like manner?—To *die* is but to *sleep*, the softest soundest repose; free from every mortal care, fear, trouble and pain: *then the weary are at their full rest*.—And when they have *rested their appointed period*, shall rise with new vigour and activity.

FROM such views of the actual process of divine wisdom in nature, may not a
rational

rational hope arise, that *death* is no other than the *birth* of a life to come; and that the *grave* shall yield an immortal *offspring*, born to possess a world of eternal light?—Is there any thing impossible or *unnatural* in this doctrine?—On the contrary, are we not led to the conception and belief of it, from what we already know and experience of the divine operations?—If the power of God framed the whole world, raised the body of the first man from the dust, made him a *living soul*, and gave him to possess the earth; if the same power is continually *raising souls* from nothing to *this life*; can it appear *incredible*, that he should *raise the dead* to *another life*?—What can be more consistent with and pursuant to the main purposes of his wisdom and goodness apparent in the formation of this world and of mankind?—O *slow of heart* to understand the power of GOD, and to trust the designs of his all-preserving and eternal providence!—On the part of the divine Attributes, and what an all-powerful, wise,

wise, and beneficent providence may intend and execute ; there does not appear, in the eye of reason, the least incredibility in the doctrine of a life to come.

BUT tho' no objection or difficulty may appear to remain, *on the part* of the divine perfections, and while we consider the boundless extent of the power, wisdom, and goodness of that eternal potentate, who is the giver and preserver of all life ; yet a formidable objection may seem to arise *on the part* of human nature, and our own meanness and unworthiness. For are mankind worthy of eternal life ? Is it credible that *mortal* man shall be made *heir of immortality* ? that *sinful* man shall be an object of divine everlasting favour ?—*What is man, that GOD should be so mindful of him ?* What is the whole world of mankind, that God should *visit them*, with so much clemency and goodness ?—How little is the greatest of men, how worthless the best, in the eye of the Sovereign Lord of all

all Beings? Compared to superior intelligences, man is but as a worm, and all the sons of men as short-lived reptiles in the dust of earth. *All nations of the earth before GOD are as nothing; they are counted to him as less than nothing and vanity.*

IN *this* view, the doctrine of a resurrection to another life might be thought incredible; if the Creator had not *already* discovered such marks of paternal goodness to his creatures of mankind: if he had not *made man but a degree lower than the angels, crowned him with honour, given him dominion over the earth, and subjected the lower animals to his use and pleasure; if he did not cause his sun to shine and his rain to descend upon us; if he did not make the elements of the world to co-operate in a wonderful manner to the preservation of human life; if he was not continually raising mankind, by the methods of his all-wise providence in the constitution of nature, to their several degrees of knowledge,*

ledge, virtue, and happiness: without this foundation in nature we could have no ground to hope for a life to come. And notwithstanding this natural foundation of evidence, it might still have been thought a *dark* and disputable doctrine, wanting a most *desirable* confirmation; if *the Father Almighty* had not also sent *his Son* into the world, *who hath brought immortality to light, and selected him, the most eminent and worthy of the human race, to be the great leader and example of the resurrection of mankind, the first-born from the dead, the Sovereign and judge of men in that unseen eternal world, which is his everlasting kingdom.* His virtue was perfected, when he voluntarily gave himself to die a most ignominious and painful death in obedience to God; and was proportionably rewarded, when he was *raised from the dead, and exalted to a throne of eternal dominion and glory.* And the virtuous endeavours of all men, how weak and imperfect soever, are in due proportion approved and accepted by

by the all-righteous and merciful Governor of the world, who despiseth not the poorest offerings of a sincere and obedient heart. Tho' human nature is infirm, and the beginnings of virtue but as the smallest sparks; *the bruised reed shall not be broken, nor the smoking flax extinguished*: where there are any sincere efforts of obedience and generous love of goodness, they are encouraged in the *Gospel*, with the most animating assurances of acceptance and favour, and *shall in no wise lose their reward*. How little and unworthy soever the human species may appear, compared to Beings of celestial dignity, wisdom and virtue, yet *it is not the will of your Father in heaven, saith our Saviour, that one of these little ones should perish*.

IF any should further object, and say, *How are the dead raised? And with what bodies do they come?*—The *Apostle's* answer is, *How doth the grain that is buried and*

dissolved in the earth *rise again*? And who *giveth* it its *proper body*?—Can that divine wisdom which hath formed matter with an infinite *variety*, and which gives to every *body*, rare or dense, solid or fluid, celestial or terrestrial, its *proper* nature and form; can such wisdom be at a loss to provide suitable receptacles, and to every spirit its proper dwelling?—Such objections proceed from the narrowness of our conceptions; and will vanish upon a more attentive and enlarged observation of the actual operations of infinite power and wisdom.

THE same beneficent and *miraculous* power, which made the *lame to walk*, the *deaf to hear*, the *blind to see*, which restored *the dead to life*, which *raised up Christ* from the grave, and seated him on a throne of celestial power and dignity, will also heal the infirmities and involuntary distempers of the human mind, endow the virtuous
soul

soul with new life and enlarged faculties, and *raise* it to that unseen state and region, where our *risen* and *exalted Saviour* holds his eternal empire.

THUS the *revealed evidence* of a resurrection from the dead to life everlasting, is founded upon and connected with the *natural credibility* of this sublime doctrine: and thus *the Gospel* enhances the natural credibility into a confirmed assurance.—*How then can it be thought incredible that GOD should raise the dead?*—The wondrous operations of divine power, in all ages and thro' universal nature, serve to persuade us of its *credibility*; the miraculous events of *Gospel-revelation* ought to convince us of its *certainty*.

LET this sublime *Faith* be established in our minds: let it encourage us to *overcome the world*: let us rejoice and triumph in the exalted hope, and unbounded prospect,

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spect of an immortal life. — O death
where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy
victory? — The all-subduing enemy of man-
kind is itself subdued. — Let us add, —
Thanks be to GOD, who giveth us the vic-
tory, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.



DISCOURSE X.

The Gospel-Discovery of a Future
State.



DISCOURSE X

The Gospel-Discovers of a Future State

[illegible]

2 TIM. 1. 10.

*Who hath abolished death, and brought life
and immortality to light by the Gospel.*

MANKIND born into this life and world, are no sooner capable of looking around them, and considering the frame of their nature and the condition of their being, than they become sensible of their mortality, and see death before them. The human frame, like that of every animal and plant upon the earth, soon decays and falls to ruin. *All flesh is grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass.* While one generation is springing up, the former is fading and passing away. The brave, the wealthy, the wise, the innocent, the

good, all come to the same end, and are involved in the universal destruction.

BUT is it an *absolute* destruction? an *eternal* period of life and Being? Are all men doomed to perish *for ever* at death? Is there *no redemption? no salvation?* In this most momentous inquiry, *revelation* comes in to our aid, and extricates us from doubt and perplexity. The *Gospel* is an authentic discovery of a life to come: it extends our view beyond this narrow scene of things, to the boundless region of an immortal existence. It overlooks the interests of this life and the wisdom of this world: it doth not instruct us in the policy of government, the prudence of laws, the discipline of war, or the arts of peace: nor does it unfold the mysteries of philosophy, or disclose the wonders of the material and visible creation. These inferior subjects are left to the natural abilities and inquiries of men. But it treats of something more important and interesting to mankind;

kind; and at the same time more unsearchable by human wisdom and penetration. It discloseth to us an invifible world, brings immortality to view, and affures us of a refurrection from death to a life everlasting.—And what other fubject can be conceived fo proper for a fupernatural difcovery, fo worthy of the interpoftion of a fuperior Being, fo equal to the dignity of a *divine revelation*.

In regard to the vifible works of creation, and the material worlds prefent to us in time but diftant in fpace, the attempts of inqutive men have been in fome meafure fuccefsful, have made fome admirable difcoveries, and brought to view many objects beyond the natural fight of the eye. But in regard to an *hereafter*, and all that may lie beyond the vifible boundary of death, no human ability, art, or invention could ever make the *leaft difcovery*. It was, as Job expreffes it, a *region of darknefs* with-

out

out any order, and where the light is as darkness.

BUT our Blessed Saviour hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light: he hath revealed this mystery of God, which laid hid in the divine counsels from the beginning of the world: he hath drawn aside the dark veil which precluded all human foresight, and opened to the eyes of our understanding a prospect into futurity; hath established our belief of a world to come, on the surest evidence; and given us all the information concerning it, that is proper to our condition, and promotive of our virtue and happiness.

MANKIND were wandering in the dark, uncertain, perplexed, conscious of guilt, rather doubting than believing a life to come, rather fearing than hoping for the consequence of death; when in the fullness of time, a messenger from heaven arrived, issuing

issuing the proclamations of divine grace, assuring men of the pardon of their sins, of a deliverance from the power of death, and of a resurrection to a life incorruptible and eternal. He spoke not of himself, but as he was authorized and directed to speak: and did not desire to be credited upon his own word alone, but upon the evidence of his miraculous works. He asserted his own authority to forgive the sins of men: and to prove it, he healed instantaneously the most inveterate distempers of men: arguing thus with the Pharisees, *Which is easier to say, Thy sins are forgiven thee, or to say, Rise, take up thy bed and walk?*—But that you may know that the son of man hath power to forgive sins, he saith to the paralytic cripple, *Rise, take up thy bed and walk.*—He pretended to the mighty power of raising all mankind from the dead; and said, *The time shall come, when all they that are in their graves shall hear the voice of the son of GOD; and they that hear shall live.* And for proof, he raised the dead by the power of his word: he

he said to the deceased daughter of Jairus, *arise*, and she arose from the dead: he commanded the corpse of the widow's son upon the bier to *arise*; and he immediately *arose to life* and health: he stood and called with a loud voice, *Lazarus come forth*; and he who had been interred four days *heard* the potent voice, *and came forth* from his *Sepulchre*. He assumed a power of conferring immortality or an eternal life; and for our conviction he himself *appeared alive* from the dead, *never to die more*, and visibly ascended to heaven: and finally, he claimed *all power in heaven*, as well as *on earth*, requisite to the eternal salvation of men, a power in the invisible regions, and over a superior order of intelligent beings: and what evidence did he give to prove this high assertion? he sent down, according to his promise, *the Holy Spirit*, to illuminate his Apostles, and enable them to work miracles in his *name*.

ALL the miracles wrought by our Lord and his Apostles; the peculiar and perfect character he invariably sustained in every discourse and action; his voluntary submission to a cruel and ignominious death; the integrity and disinterestedness of his Apostles; the consistency of the Gospel-doctrines; the purity of all its precepts; the accomplishment of predictions; furnish various evidences to the same effect; To prove the truth of our Lord's *high pretensions*, in assuming to himself an eternal dominion over mankind, as the immediate Author of a life to come, and the dispenser of the rewards of immortality to the human race.

BUT the *particular fact*, on which our Lord and his Apostles seem to lay the greatest stress, as the special evidence of a future state, and of his own dominion and authority in that state; was *his own resurrection*: it was by *his own rising and appearing alive from the dead to many witnesses*, and
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by many infallible proofs, that he abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light.—Thus St. Peter says, Blessed be the GOD and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath regenerated us to a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, reserved for us.—

So the Apostle John introduces his Epistle with expressing the absolute certainty of our Lord's resurrection, and alledging it as the discovery and proof of a life to come;—What we have heard, what we have seen with our own eyes, what we have viewed, what our hands have handled of the word of life, we declare unto you: for the life to come was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness of it, even that eternal life which was with the Father, and which is now discovered to us:—Plainly referring to our Lord's resurrection, and the infallible evidence the Apostles had of it from their own senses.—In like manner St. Paul connects a future state with Christ's resurrection:

rection:—Now if Christ be risen, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead? For if the dead rise not, then Christ is not risen, and we are found false witnesses of GOD:—But now Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept.—Here he considers the particular resurrection of our Saviour, as the proof, specimen, and commencement of a future life to mankind in general.—And the Author of the Book of Revelations introduces our Lord in his risen and exalted state, as speaking of himself with great dignity, saying, *I am the first and the last; that is, the chief of Mankind, who was dead, but am alive, and behold I live for evermore, and I possess the keys of death and the invisible world.*

THE general theory of the Gospel concerning the nature, design and end of a life to come, is most just and rational; and includes in it the true natural evidence of its reality. For it represents the raising
man-

mankind from death to another life, as a mighty operation of the glorious power of God, a constitution of his infinite wisdom, and an effect of his paternal goodness and benevolence: and deduces the primary evidences of our belief, not from the attributes or qualities of the *human* soul, but from the *divine* perfections; not from the *merits* of good men, but from the *grace* or favour of the Father Almighty; who in pursuance of the same purposes of wisdom and goodness for which he created mankind to this life, saves them from perishing at death, and raises them to another life and world. And as the good of mankind was evidently an object of the divine intention, in the formation of this world; so the scheme of another life and world, which is as it were a new creation and constitution of things, hath for its end the greater good and eternal happiness of mankind: and was formed in the divine counsel, not from a motive of *resentment* against the *sins* of men, but of *love* and mercy to mankind,

mankind, *the sinners*; not to shew the rigour of his justice in punishing the wicked, but the boundless extent of his goodness in saving to eternal ages the virtuous and pious: from which salvation none shall be excluded, but they who disqualify themselves for it, by their impenitence and presumptuous wickedness; and whose punishment and destruction are requisite to the purposes of goodness itself, to the ends of divine government, and to the highest virtue and happiness of the rational creation.

SUCH is the general view, which our Saviour and his Apostles give us of this sublime subject. In support of which we may single out, among many other passages, the following words of our Saviour: *GOD so loved the world, that he hath given his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have everlasting life:— and sent him, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved thro' him.—*

And those of the Apostle;—*GOD, who is rich in mercy, for the great love wherewith he loved mankind, hath quickened us even when dead in sins, and raised us up together with Christ, and seated us with him in the heavenly places; that he might shew in the ages to come the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness towards them in Christ Jesus.*

OUR Saviour himself describes the general nature and design of the future state, and particularly the grand distinction and final separation, which will be made by his own judgment and authority, according to the difference of men's characters, in various familiar comparisons, suited to the capacity, conduct, and experience of men.
 —As the husbandman carefully separates the good grain from the useless chaff, and reposes the former in his garner, but destroys the latter: as the fisherman gathers of every kind into his net, but separates the good into vessels, and casts the bad away: as the master of a feast admits those whom he judgeth

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to be *worthy*, but rejects and excludes the *unworthy*: as the *Prince* rewards those who serve him with fidelity, according to the capacity in which he hath placed them, but condemns the unprofitable and treacherous servant:—As *all men*, in all things subject to their cognizance and judgment, usually *distinguish* the good from the bad, the fit from the unfit, the useful from the noxious:—So shall it be at the end of *this world*: a distinction and separation will be made, by a most wise judgment and just appointment, between good and evil men. *The Son of Man*, the appointed judge, will send forth his angels, and sever the wicked from among the just, and destroy the former, but preserve the latter in eternal life.

THE condemnation of the wicked to eternal destruction in another state, does not detract from the goodness of the divine intention and operation, in raising mankind to another life. For as the creating

all mankind to this life is undoubtedly *an effect of divine beneficence*, tho' some men make themselves wicked and miserable in it, and come to an untimely and tragical end; so *much more* is the restoration of all mankind to a life after death, *an effect of infinite goodness*, tho' some shall afterwards perish for ever; and instead of enjoying that eternal life, which is *the gift of GOD in Christ Jesus our Lord*, shall undergo the misery and penalty of an absolute and eternal destruction.—This procedure is analogous to the experienced constitution and process of nature. As the providence of God produceth all mankind into this world, according to one and the same law and order of nature; so the beneficent operation of Almighty Power, in raising men to another life, extends to the *whole collective body of mankind*: tho' far *greater distinctions* will arise in *that* life, than *any* we observe in *this*: distinctions proportioned to the moral character and desert of every man: and the wicked shall be finally

excluded from that life, and condemned to perish in death eternal. The redemption which is in *Christ Jesus our Lord*, considered as a deliverance from the power of death, or a resurrection to another life, is a benefit or privilege bestowed on mankind in general; in like manner as their production into this life: but the everlasting possession of that life is peculiar to the righteous: not to any nation, party, or profession of men; but to the virtuous and good of all mankind. *For they who have done good shall come forth to the resurrection of life; and they who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.*

How clear and rational this account is, how consistent with the constitution of nature, how agreeable to our best apprehensions of the divine perfections and government, and conducive to the satisfaction of every good mind, will easily appear to the thoughtful and ingenuous part of mankind.

WE shall proceed to some particular views, which the Gospel *reveals* and represents to us, of the future state and life; such as we may clearly collect from some memorable passages of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*.—And here it becomes us to adhere *closely* to the express words of *Holy Scripture*; lest we should indulge a vain and groundless imagination, instead of attending to those solid truths of revelation which are proper to influence our practice.

FIRST: Our Blessed Saviour informs us, that the future state of good men, or their manner of existence and life, shall bear a resemblance to that of a superior order of Beings, who are denominated the *Angels* of God:—*They shall be like* (for so it should be translated) *unto the angels*. Luke xx. 36.—That there is a rank or order of Beings, the creatures and servants of God, of a nature and dignity far superior to the mortal inhabitants of the earth, invisible to us, yet spectators of human actions,

tions, is a sentiment that seems natural to mankind, as it has prevailed more or less in all ages and nations; and will appear upon examination agreeable to the best philosophy, and the most rational ideas we are able to form of the immense system of the universe. — This sentiment, abstracted from the fictitious and corrupt additions made to it by the *Jews* and *Heathens*, is confirmed by our holy religion: and those benevolent spirits are described as *rejoicing at the repentance of every sinner*; as *ministering to the heirs of Salvation*; as attending upon our Lord in the most important emergencies; and as employed by him in the future state of mankind, and in the execution of the final judgment. The resurrection of good men therefore will be to a state, rank, degree, and manner of existence, different from and superior to the present state of mankind, and *similar* to that of the angelic order, who are now conversant, tho' invisible, with the actions and characters of mankind.

SECONDLY: It will be a state of society, in which all good men, *the sons of the resurrection*, shall enjoy in common the same rank and condition of Being, and have a mutual connection and intercourse, as belonging to the same general community. And this is so often intimated in the writings of the *New Testament*, that it is unnecessary to produce particular passages: and it is an idea, which an attentive observation of the œconomy of divine wisdom, in the arrangement of the several species of creatures in this visible world, may lead us to conceive and approve.

THIRDLY: It will be the *same* state in which our Saviour himself is resident. For he says to his disciples before his departure from this world, *I am going to prepare a place for you, that where I am there ye may be also*. And as the punishment of the wicked is described by an expulsion or banishment from his presence, so the happiness of good men is expressed by their *being admitted into*

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his presence and joy, and by dwelling for ever together with him.

FOURTHLY : It is represented as a state of government, and in which mankind shall be united under *one* head and ruler, even our *Saviour himself*, the Redeemer of mankind, who underwent sufferings and death in this world of mortality, that, by his ineffimable virtue, he might be found *worthy* to receive honour, glory, and everlasting dominion, and become the author of immortality to mortal men, and their eternal King. And *this future state* is constantly described as being the true, proper, peculiar and everlasting kingdom of our Lord. And there is *no other* state, life, or world to come for mankind, but that over which our Lord rules, and where he hath obtained an eternal empire, and into which all good men shall have *an abundant entrance administered* to them ; but into which the workers of iniquity shall have no admission. And the qualifications requisite for an admission

mission into *this kingdom of heaven* are described at large, with the most express and solemn assurances, that no admission can be obtained without them.

FIFTHLY: It is described by our Saviour himself, as *one particular state, region, or world of habitation*, distinct from numberless others which are in the infinite universe. *In my Father's house, says he, are many mansions:—*In the immensity of space possessed by the infinite Being, there are various states and worlds of residence, fit for the various orders and ranks of his intelligent creatures. *I am going to prepare a place for you, an habitation fit for the reception of my followers, that where I am there ye may be also.*

SIXTHLY: It is represented by the *Apostle Paul*, as a *bodily state*; in which the human spirit shall be invested, not with a body like these dissolvable and mortal bodies, nor composed of the same materials:

rials: for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of GOD: but with a fabric of GOD, incorruptible, fashioned after Christ's glorious body, by that mighty power by which He is able to subdue every thing to himself. For as there are various kinds of bodies subject to our senses, so there are numberless other kinds of which we have no sense or knowledge: And GOD giveth to every creature its own proper body, of what nature and duration he pleases, according to the state of life for which it is designed: and so shall it be, says the Apostle, in the resurrection. And comparing the transformation which human nature shall receive at the resurrection, to that which the seeds of plants undergo when they are sown in the earth, he says, *It is sown in corruption, but raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonour, but raised in glory: it is sown an animal body, but raised a spiritual body:* (so greatly does the comparison fall short here between the resurrection of plants from seed and that of mankind from the dead:)

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He adds, *for there is an animal or mortal body; and there is a spiritual or a refined and immortal body.*

SEVENTHLY and lastly: as to the particular *time* as well as manner, in which the divine wisdom directs the mighty operation of raising mankind to another life; revelation seems not to determine expressly, whether the spirits of good men are raised *immediately* after death to another life, or whether they continue for a *period* of time in a *state of death*, or, as the holy writers term it, *sleep*, their faculties being *suspended* in total inactivity and insensibility. For it is not for us to know the times and seasons which the Father Almighty hath reserved to his own power. And where revelation stops, it is a vain attempt to proceed further: and all speculations and conjectures only serve to indulge an useless and unreasonable curiosity, which ought to be repressed.

—The account which the Apostle gives us is sufficient to our satisfaction; *that as*

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*in Adam, or after the example of Adam, all die; so after the example of Christ's resurrection all shall be made alive: but every man in his due order: Christ the first fruits; afterwards they who are Christ's at his coming: and after that cometh the end.—*From which we may collect, what is in itself the most rational supposition, That, as in all other divine operations, so in the vast transaction of raising the dead to another life, there will be a determinate order and regular process. And there is one observation may here occur, which as it plainly tends to the encouragement of virtue and piety, should not be suppressed in silence; which is, that as every one shall be raised in *his due order*, there appears to be a priority or *precedency* allotted to good men, and that they shall be raised before the rest of mankind. Our Blessed Saviour, who was beyond comparison the *best of men*, was also, according to scripture-account, the *first of mankind* who arose from the dead to die no more: hence he is stiled the *first fruits of them*

them that slept; the first-born from the dead; the first-born amongst many brethren; the first-born of every creature: and faithful christians are represented as raised the next in order of time, and prior to the general and final resurrection of mankind at the end of the world. The Apostle Paul strongly expresses his own hope and expectation of being immediately raised from death to the same state and life with Christ our Saviour, in the 5th chapter of his 2d Epistle to the Corinthians. For we know that when our earthly dwelling (meaning his own mortal body) is dissolved, we have a fabric of GOD, an habitation not made with hands, eternal in the heavens; that is, an immortal body. He then expresses his desire of passing into that state, and being invested with that celestial body, and if it could be, without undergoing the pain and terror of a bodily dissolution, that so mortality might be swallowed up of life: for he confesses that the apprehensions of death were burdensome to him. But notwithstanding this, he al-

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ways supported himself with courage against the terror of death, from this consideration, That whilst he remained in this present bodily state, he was absent from Christ; and that when he quitted it he should be present with him. — But whatever precedence or peculiar privileges may be conferred by divine favour on good men; the end of this world is continually referred to, as the great period of a general resurrection of mankind; and this with the greatest propriety: for as the future state and life is represented in contrast to the whole present state and life of mankind in general, and the world to come, is represented as succeeding in time to this present world; so therefore, whatever the order and process of the resurrection may be, yet the end of this world is justly and with an exact propriety referred to continually, as the great period of revolution, when all shall be raised, when the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour shall be fully and finally established, and

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all enemies, even *the last enemy, death*, shall be totally destroyed.

Thus I have endeavoured to point out the particular views which the *Gospel-revelation* hath exhibited to us, illustrating the general belief and prospect of a life to come.—I shall beg leave to subjoin by way of caution, that these things are revealed, not to administer food for a vain trifling wandering imagination, but to inform the understanding and govern the heart, by giving light and force to that grand principle of true religion, of solid virtue, and extensive goodness; *the faith of a life to come*, and of the eternal justice and goodness of the Almighty Creator and governor of this and all other worlds visible and invisible.—This is the most solemn and important subject to which we can possibly turn our attention, and in which every man is interested to a degree beyond the power of his own conception; and of which

which we could no way gain the least knowledge, but by a divine revelation.

It becomes us then to receive, with lively gratitude and deep attention, the intelligences given us by our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, concerning this mysterious subject unsearchable to human reason. The more seriously and impartially we attend to the Gospel-account of a future state, it will appear the more convincive and satisfactory, and be the more attractive of our devout affection gratitude and hope. The Gospel points out the strongest natural evidence of a world to come, by leading us to consider all the effects of divine goodness to mankind in this life, as arguments for his more extensive goodness hereafter. It gives us also the supernatural evidence of miracles, and especially of Christ's actual resurrection from the dead. What do we conceive could move the Almighty to create mankind to this life, but his own goodness? And to what cause can we as-

cribe our future existence, or (if I may so express it) his *re-creating* mankind to another life, but to the same goodness?—Exclusive of the benevolent purpose of infinite and eternal goodness, all mankind would perish for ever at death: *but it is the mystery of GOD revealed in the Gospel, that thro' his inestimable love and mercy to mankind dispensed by Christ Jesus our Lord, eternal life shall be the inheritance and reward of all who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and immortality.*



DISCOURSE XI.

The Christian Evidence of a Future State.



DISCOURSE XI.

The Christian Evidence of a Free State.

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I COR. XV. - 12.

But if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead; how say some amongst you, that there is no resurrection of the dead?

THE most valuable advantage we derive from the knowledge of the *Gospel*, is the belief of a life to come, founded on the evidence of *Christ's* resurrection.

THE being and perfections of God, the Maker and governor of the universe are discoverable, by the light of nature. We confess the *power* of God, because we *see* it, in the astonishing motions of the heavenly orbs, and other mighty operations in nature: we acknowledge his *wisdom*, because it *appears* in the structure of the whole

world, and of every creature in it : we own his goodness, because we experience it in every enjoyment of life. In these first points of religion, the evidence of nature is clear and demonstrative. ~~And~~ the ample displays of divine power and goodness to mankind in *this* life and world, may lead us to form some probable conjectures and pleasing hopes, that the same all-wise and beneficent power, which produces mankind into existence and life in *this* world, and which bestows upon them so many present felicities, *may* have further designs of goodness to men; and *may* raise mankind from the dead to *another* life, even a life superior in kind and duration; and to which this life is but an introduction or preparation, like the state of infancy, compared to mature age; and that the seeds of knowledge and virtue sown in the human mind, and springing up in this world, *may* not be utterly laid waste and *destroyed* at death; but on the contrary, *survive* the dreary tem-

tempest, and rise again to an immortal harvest.

HUMAN reason cultivated by a study of nature, and raised to high conceptions of the purposes of infinite wisdom, may suggest such sentiments as these: and men of liberal and elevated minds will gladly lay hold of every just argument, to support and fortify themselves, in the sublime and pleasing hope of rising from death to life and immortality.—Now, to men of such worthy sentiments and dispositions, nothing can be more welcome than the *christian revelation*, rightly understood: in which they find such a theory of the government of God, of the purposes of his wisdom, justice, and goodness to mankind, and of *this* life as connected with and *introductory* to a *future* and eternal life; as the purest reason of mankind will most approve, corresponding to all the evidences and intimations of nature, and free from those so-

phistical and partial arguments, by which some have perplexed the doctrine of a future state. For the *Gospel* derives our hope of a life to come, from the true original fountain of divine power and wisdom, and the purpose of his paternal goodness and mercy to mankind; and represents this world, as intended for a state of minority, discipline, and education, in order to the enjoyment of a nobler kind of life in a future state.

BUT, tho' this theory or representation of things is both consistent with itself, and agreeable to the most refined and elevated conceptions of the attributes of God and the purposes of his wisdom and benevolence in the formation of this world and of human nature; yet a *further evidence* of another life not only is *desirable*, but seems *necessary* to confirm the truth of it, and to convert it from a *plausible speculation* into an *established belief*, sufficient to the
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support of virtue, in every trial of life and death.

For how ingeniously and plausibly forever men may argue, from the designs of creative wisdom, and the measures of governing justice, executed in the visible order of the creation and the present state of mankind; and hence infer that God intends to raise men from the dead, and that this life is introductory to another; yet it may be objected, “ That such kind of reasoning is not sufficient to give intire satisfaction, and to deliver the mind from all uncertainty and suspense:—There is a weakness inherent in the very nature of all such arguments, which degrades them into mere probable conjectures.—It may seem to us, by the best light of nature, agreeable to the wisdom, justice, and goodness of the Almighty Creator, to appoint a future state for mankind: but does it follow of a certainty, that God will act, as *we think* he ought? Is it

“ it a proof that God hath determined
“ thus, because it appears to *us* a conduct
“ becoming his infinite perfections? Are
“ men so capable of judging what is fittest
“ and best for a Being of infinite wisdom
“ to design, as to conclude with any de-
“ gree of assurance that it is his design?
“ *Hath he eyes of flesh? and doth he see as*
“ *man seeth?* Doth he determine according
“ to human judgment and the dictates of
“ our shallow understandings? Is not his
“ wisdom infinite? and is there ought in-
“ finite in man, but his weakness and ig-
“ norance?—There is a wide difference
“ between what the power of God *may* ef-
“ fect, and his actual *will* and *purpose* to
“ effect it. We believe the power and
“ wisdom of God in the constitution of
“ this world and his goodness in this life,
“ because we see the evident marks and ex-
“ perience the effects: but another life and
“ world are *wholly miraculous*, and beyond
“ all our sight, sense, and *experience*: the
“ visible structure of this world, and pro-
“ cess

“cess of nature in it, can afford but a very
 “imperfect evidence of an invifible world,
 “and a state of things out of apparent na-
 “ture. And tho’ the divine goodness be
 “perfect and infinite; yet his creatures
 “partake of his infinite goodness, only
 “according to the *limited* nature and mea-
 “sure of duration, which he hath assigned to
 “them, whether sensitive or rational, hu-
 “man or angelic, mortal or immortal.
 “Let it be granted, that there are innu-
 “merable spirits in the boundless universe,
 “who are created of an *immortal* nature,
 “and who enjoy their Creator’s goodness
 “in an *eternal* life: but what pretence hath
 “man to an eternal existence, who is made
 “of the *dust* of the earth, to which he
 “must soon *return*? We doubt not the
 “power of God to rescue mankind from
 “the apparent destruction of death and
 “the grave; nor do we deny his infinite
 “goodness: but we doubt the purpose of
 “his *will* to bestow an immortal life on
 “men; because mankind do not appear to
 “be

“ be the proper objects of *such* goodness :
 “ even the best of men have reason to be
 “ contented with what they receive from
 “ the divine liberality in *this* life, without
 “ vainly pretending to a happiness beyond
 “ death and the enjoyment of immorta-
 “ lity.—All the arguments therefore of
 “ reason or natural religion for a future
 “ state, are little better than presumptions,
 “ not *proofs*, conjectures, not *discoveries*.
 “ We are therefore desirous of some fur-
 “ ther, special, and direct proof, in order
 “ to remove our doubts, and establish our
 “ belief of the divine intention to bestow
 “ so inconceivable and inestimable a pri-
 “ vilege on men, as that of a resurrec-
 “ tion from death and corruption to a life
 “ incorruptible and eternal.”

Now it is our great happiness as christians
 to find all these doubts removed in the
Gospel revelation, and to be furnished, in a
 most signal manner, with *that kind of proof*,
 so much to be *desired*, and so proper to
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give us all reasonable *satisfaction*. The more we attend in this view to the doctrines of the Gospel, to the character and actions of our Lord, and particularly to the great event of his resurrection and appearance after death; the more ample conviction we shall receive, and be affected with joy and gratitude on occasion of so clear a discovery, and *satisfactory* evidence, of a life to come.

THE Gospel is the assurance of a life and world to come. This Gospel of the kingdom of heaven our Blessed Saviour himself preached; and he was the *first* and *only* prophet of God who did preach it, and to whom the other Prophets bear witness: he *taught* it in the course of his life; He *proved* it by miracles; He *confirmed* it by his own resurrection from the dead, when he *appeared* openly, not indeed to *all the people*, but to faithful and sufficient witnesses chosen before of GOD: The Evangelists and Apostles are the reporters of this Gospel, and the evidence

dence of it, to the world: and they establish our belief of a world to come. — How? — Not by offering to us the dreams of *Homer*, the reveries of *Plato*, or the doubts of *Socrates* or *Cicero*; but by declaring to us a *matter of fact* and of *their own experience*; when the *life to come* was indeed *discovered* and *proved* to them; when, contrary to their expectations and their prejudices, to their vast amazement and terror, succeeded by a joy beyond description, *They saw with their own eyes, viewed at their leisure, and handled with their own hands*, the person of our Lord after his resurrection. — This is a *fact*, in which they could not possibly be *deceived themselves*, but must know of a certainty, whether they had, or had not, seen and conversed with him after his crucifixion: and a fact, in which they could not *intend to deceive others*, by perishing to death in support of a falsehood; unless they were the most foolish and absurd, as well as the most insincere and impudent of all men. And their

their *testimony* is also accompanied by such a train of circumstances and events; that *no single fact* recorded in all History, is either supported by such *unexceptionable witnesses*, or confirmed with such collateral and subsequent proofs.

HERE is then an *experimental evidence* of a future state, more proper in itself to determine our belief, and in all its circumstances to govern our practice, than the most probable conjectures of the ablest reasoners. For whatever speculations and probable conjectures men may frame upon other grounds; yet if ever there was an *instance* of a person *actually returning from the dead*, to assure men of a future state; *this fact is decisive*; and is a kind of proof which gives the mind more content and satisfaction, than the deepest refinements of the wisest Philosophers; as it removes all objections arising from the *unexperienced* and *unknown* nature of a life to come. Till our Saviour's resurrection, all beyond death.

death was indeed, as the Poet expresses it, *the undiscovered country from whence no traveller had ever returned*. But here was an *actual return* of a most illustrious and distinguished person, and for *this* purpose, among *others*, of ascertaining to us a general resurrection of mankind.

— In forming and establishing our religious belief, we are not first to frame notions and opinions after our own conceit, and then deduce *facts* from *doctrines*; but to examine first into matters of fact, and then deduce our doctrines from them.—

In *natural religion*, we are not to determine previously from our own reason, what is fit for a being of infinite perfection to do, and thence *infer* the thing done; but to observe first the actual works of God, and the appointments of his providence; and then learn, as far as we are able, the wisdom, goodness, and perfection of those works, and build the doctrines of religion upon the *facts of nature*. So in regard to
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our christian faith, it is not the business of christians to heap up notions by their own fancy or the tradition of others, concerning the Gospel in general, or the person and office of our Saviour in particular; but to attend to the *facts* recorded and established by the united and indubitable testimony of the evangelists and apostles, and upon *them* to build our doctrines of christian faith.

THIS is the method the *Apostles* themselves use. And the *great fact* to which they appeal, to which all other facts recorded have a reference and subserviency, and which is the foundation of the whole fabrick of christianity, is the *resurrection of our Lord from the dead*. And what a firm superstructure of doctrine they build upon this foundation of fact, we may easily learn.—Hear the apostle Paul deliver the Gospel, in the 15th Chapter of his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians: *I now declare to you the Gospel which I have before*

preached unto you: for I delivered unto you first of all, that Christ died and was buried, and that he rose again the third day: that after his resurrection he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve, after that of five hundred brethren at once, the greater part of whom are alive to this day: after that he was seen of James, then again of all the Apostles: and last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. Then the Apostle proceeds from the fact to the doctrine. Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead; how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead? that is no future state. For the term resurrection in scripture always means a future state: and the modern notion of two distinct resurrections, one of the soul and another of the body, is a meer vulgar error; there is no such distinction in the new testament. But, continues the Apostle, if there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then

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then our preaching is vain, and your faith also is vain; yea and we are found false witnesses of GOD; because we have testified of GOD that he raised up Christ, whom he did not raise up, if it be true that the dead rise not: for if the dead rise not, then Christ is not raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain, you are yet in your sins, and even they who are fallen asleep in Christ are perished: but now Christ is risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. — It is evident here, that the Apostle founds the doctrine of a future state or a life to come upon the actual resurrection of our Saviour from the dead; expressing in the strongest terms the dependance of the one event upon the other; insomuch that he seems to give up all hope of another life, separate from the truth of that fact. — In like manner, he founds the doctrine of a future judgment to be administered by our Lord, upon the same fact, in the summary account which he gives of the Gospel, in his speech

to the great court of judicature at Athens: the times of ignorance GOD winketh at; but now commands all men every-where to repent: inasmuch as he hath appointed a time when he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained: whereof he hath given an assurance, by raising him from the dead. Here the Apostle establishes our belief of a future judgment and the judicial authority of our blessed Saviour upon the fact of his resurrection.—The same order and connexion may be observed in the apostle Peter's account of the Gospel to Cornelius the Roman officer: we are witnesses of all things which Jesus did, both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree; him GOD raised the third day, and shewed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of GOD, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead: and he commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify, that it is he who was

ordained of GOD to be the judge of quick and dead.

THESE instances are sufficient to show how the *Apostles* appeal to the fact of *Christ's* resurrection for the truth of the doctrines which they taught of a future state, a judgment to come, and the dominion and authority of our Lord and Saviour. And here is evidently a solid and sufficient foundation to support these doctrines: If we believe that our Lord actually rose from the dead, we cannot doubt of the reality of a future state, or of that power which he assumed to himself, and which his apostles attributed to him, of raising mankind from the dead and judging and disposing of them in another life. This single fact being admitted, our whole christian faith is sufficiently established. All the real and essential doctrines of christianity are built upon it. And all objections against christianity, which do not tend to disprove that fact, are either level-

ed against something else in the stead of christianity, or are of little weight and moment. And all arguments in defence of the *christian* religion, which do not serve to evince that fact, are unnecessary.

FROM the reality of our Lord's resurrection, it undeniably follows, that he was all that he pretended to be, *the SON of GOD*; meaning by that title, not any thing concerning his essence or substance (tho' it has been absurdly misapplied to that sense) but his moral character and dignity and the high honour and favour which he had with GOD: for by his resurrection, says the apostle, *he was declared to be the son of GOD with power*. It follows, that GOD hath exalted him to be an eternal Prince and Saviour, the judge of the world, and the giver of immortality to mankind: or as our Lord himself expresses it, *that GOD hath committed all judgment to him, and hath given him power over all flesh, that is, all mankind, to give eternal life to as*

many as GOD hath given him.—Upon this ground of evidence, we receive like Cornelius, with a reverential belief, the declaration which the apostle Peter made to him, that the man Christ Jesus, who was crucified, dead and buried, and who rose again, and shewed himself alive from the dead by many infallible proofs to witnesses chosen by divine providence, is ordained of GOD (as he commanded his apostles to declare and attest) to be the judge of quick and dead, that is, of all mankind of all past ages as well as present and to come.

It is of no force to urge here by way of objection, that in this divine constitution, this kingdom of heaven, there is something mysterious and unaccountable, that we cannot fully understand it, or comprehend the whole manner of it, and all the reasons of infinite wisdom in establishing it.—All such objections are founded meerly on human ignorance, and are exceedingly weak and frivolous. For

what work of infinite wisdom, what dispensation of eternal providence, what divine constitution thro' universal nature, can our understandings thoroughly comprehend?—It implies the utmost degree of folly and arrogance to imagine, that we can understand the whole reason and method of any divine procedure; much more when the subject is nothing less than a future state, and the eternal government and disposal of the whole collective body of mankind from the beginning to the end of the world.—It is our wisdom first to inquire into facts, and learn as far as we are able what the power and wisdom of God hath actually appointed; and then to adore with reverence, obey with willingness, give thanks with cheerfulness, and *rejoice in hope*.

Let it not be imagined, that under colour of human ignorance, we are attempting to screen any thing weak and absurd in the doctrines of christianity,
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any thing that will not bear examination; any thing contradictory to the reason of mankind, or inconsistent with the appearances of nature and the usual order of God's providence. Christianity stands in no need of artifice, and rejects with contempt the subtle evasions of human wit in its defence. All the genuine doctrines of it are perfectly rational, and as intelligible as any things concerning another life and world can possibly be made to human sense and knowledge. There is a wide difference between our not being able, thro' want of capacity, to understand fully the whole of any thing, and it being contrary to what we do clearly understand.—Every work of God, and every doctrine of religion exceeds in some respect our capacity of comprehension: but no work of God, no truth of religion is or can be *contrary* to our clear reason and knowledge. And the genuine and *peculiar* doctrines of christianity are *peculiarly plain* and intelligible: and nothing but an obscure

scure multiplicity of words and figures, disguising instead of explaining them, can render them difficult to be understood, or bring them into controversy and confusion. That Christ rose from the dead, that he is exalted to glory and dominion, that he is appointed judge of mankind, and empowered to bestow the rewards of immortality upon all virtuous and good men; are propositions as plain to be understood, and lie as much within the compass of our ideas, as the doctrines of God's immensity and eternity, his creating all things out of nothing, his universal providence, or any other truth of natural religion.

MEN have indeed framed adopted and propagated many strange and absurd doctrines, and confounded them with the Gospel. But let those who have espoused them be alone answerable for them: let such *blind believers* carry on the controversy with as *blind unbelievers*, one imagining themselves to be *defending*, and the other

the other attacking the christian revelation; when in reality, it is not in the least concerned, and the Gospel itself stands clear and firm, separate from all such false, or at best, dark and dubious notions.—What clouds of vapour and smoke have arisen from the gross fictions and fiery disputations of contentious men, obscuring the native clearness and lustre of the Gospel of Christ!—But as when mists and clouds vanish, we may lift up our eyes and see the one grand object, the glorious Sun shining with its own inherent splendor;—so when the thick fumes of prejudice error and contention which arise to intercept our views, are dissipated or subsided, we may then contemplate with the clear eye of a rational faith the Son of GOD the Saviour of the world shining in wisdom power and goodness above all the sons of men, risen from the dead, ascended to a throne of dominion and judgment in the upper regions, and dispensing the light of true religion in this world;

world; and what is more and greater, and the *sublime end of his office*, the rewards of eternal life in a world to come.

THIS Gospel is perfectly rational in itself, and worthy of all acceptance; It corresponds to our purest sentiments, and our worthiest desires and hopes. And the testimony of the *Evangelists* and *Apostles* to the reality of our Lord's resurrection, is a sufficient ground of our firm belief, and an evidence superior to all imaginable objections.

BUT as it may serve to obviate some difficulties, may afford some satisfaction to inquisitive minds, and may conduce to strengthen the influence of the Gospel; we shall proceed to consider it in the following discourse, in analogy to the constitution of the world, and the apparent order of divine providence in it.



DISCOURSE XII.

The Consistency of the Christian
Scheme, &c.



The Christian Ministry, &c.
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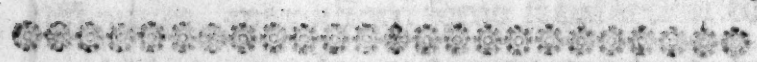


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DISCOURSE XII.

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The Consistency of the Christian
Scheme, &c.



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the witnesses who have reported the Gospel

ACTS X. 42.

And he commanded us to preach unto the people and to testify, that it is He who is ordained of GOD to be the judge of quick and dead.

THE exaltation of our *Saviour* from his human state to the throne of universal judgement over mankind, and the mighty power of raising them from the dead, and determining their future eternal condition; is a dispensation of the same infinite wisdom which made this world and mankind: and it is revealed, made credible, and sufficiently ascertained to us, by the whole history of the discourses and actions of our *Saviour*; but particularly and principally by his resurrection, *when he shewed himself alive from the dead openly and by many infallible proofs to those faith-*

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ful witnesses who have reported the Gospel unto us.

IN this, as in all other constitutions of eternal providence, there is much more than our understandings can give any distinct account of, or indeed are capable of conceiving: but there is nothing contrary to the reason of mankind, or inconsistent with those apprehensions of divine wisdom power and goodness, which we collect from nature around us.—Another world and a higher state of being, the economy of things in it, and the relation of mankind to it, are subjects which we may well suppose cannot be fully revealed to us, or comprehended by us; as they are not only beyond our experience, but above our faculties.

THE discoveries of the intellectual universe, made by *revelation*, seem to bear a similitude and proportion, to those of the material creation, made by human study and

and enquiry. For as the vast theatre of the skies, and the material worlds pendent in the immense spaces, are not only defined by elaborate arguments, but even made to approach *nearer* in appearance; and to become in a surprizing degree *objects of sight and experience*; so the intellectual worlds of *angels and the spirits of just men made perfect*, and the vast scene of an immortal life, are not only asserted in doctrines of truth, but reduced by a miraculous operation within the compass of sensible and *experimental evidence*, and brought *near* to our prospective view. But notwithstanding, as the all-wise Creator hath limited all human sense and science, concerning the visible creation, to certain proper bounds, and they are still but obscure and imperfect glimpses men are able to obtain of the celestial orbs; so divine revelation is limited by the like rule and proportion: and the Apostle justly expresses himself, when he says, *We know but in part, and prophecy but in part,*

and see future things but as it were in a glass darkly, or by an obscure and distant reflection; and again, *We walk by Faith, and not by sight*; the life of angels, and of human spirits raised from the dead and exalted to a superior manner and degree of existence, is still a *mystery*, the object of *Faith*, not of *sight*, of reason, not of bodily sense. — As it is impossible to make those who are blind from their birth, to understand the nature of light and colours, or how other men are able to perceive distant objects by the power of sight; so it may be justly supposed equally impossible, that the powers of a superior order of beings, and their manner of perception and action, should be made intelligible by any human language.

BUT at the same time, in all that our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* have delivered to us concerning these most sublime subjects, there is no doctrine opposite to our experience, or in itself irrational and incredible. — In the

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visible works of God, and that constitution of his providence which regards the *present* state of mankind, there are many *inexplicable* appearances, and the whole order and reason of things far *surpass* our comprehension: so, in that constitution of infinite wisdom, which regards the *future* and eternal state of mankind, there must necessarily be much *more* of what is *inexplicable*; and *beyond* the limits of our judgment and apprehension. But as in the displays of nature, men may discover by search and examination reasons of things, which were not apparent *at first view*; so in the doctrines of revelation, we may come to discern, by a careful and judicious attention, more reasons within the verge of our capacity, than we *at first* apprehended. Such reasons are *not* indeed direct *proofs* of the truth of the Gospel, which rests upon the facts recorded and supported by the strongest testimony: but if the scheme of *human redemption* can be shewn to be not only not contrary to the

order of creation and providence, but in the most important views *similar* to, and consistent with it; it may remove speculative objections, and give us a just satisfaction: and it is *so far* an argument for the truth of the Gospel, *as* it shews that such a scheme could not be the invention of such illiterate men, as the *Apostles* were, without an unaccountable and indeed *miraculous* enlargement of their understandings.

THAT the judgment and disposal of the whole collective race of mankind in regard to their state after death is delegated or committed to a person, who hath himself existed in human nature, and who rose from the lowest condition of human life to this amazing height of power and dominion, of office and authority in the universe of God; is the doctrine we are to reconcile with the dictates of reason, the appearances of nature, and the experienced order and conduct of Divine Providence.

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To this end it will be proper to bestow some attention upon the following series of arguments; which I shall not expatiate on at large, but rather suggest to the reflections of any, who may have capacity and a habit of thinking requisite to such subjects.

FIRST: It plainly appears throughout the whole visible order of the creation, that the purposes of infinite wisdom are accomplished by the intervention, either of material causes, or of intelligent beings subject to the will and design of the Supreme Being. All the events befalling mankind in this life are effected in this manner. It is therefore conformable to the whole plan of nature, that the events of another life, and the divine purposes in regard to the future condition of mankind, shall be effected by the like intervention, not indeed of *material* causes, but of some *one* or more *intelligent* and powerful beings. Therefore the Scripture-Doctrine of a *Mediator between GOD and Man*, in order to our eter-

nal Salvation, is perfectly rational and agreeable to the constitution of nature.

SECONDLY: That there are orders of wise, powerful, and active beings, the subjects and servants of the One Supreme Being, but far superior to mankind, is a dictate of *reason* as well as *revelation*: and that the welfare, happiness, and salvation of mankind should be an object of *their* regard and benevolence, and, *as our Saviour asserts*, the repentance of sinners an occasion of joy amongst them; is a natural and credible sentiment.—But what exertions of power or of virtue any of them may employ for the benefit and salvation of men, cannot appear to us, except by *visible miracles*.

THIRDLY: That the mighty province of raising mankind to another life, and disposing of them according to their respective qualifications, should be committed to a *Mediator*, who hath himself exhibited the
most

most perfect humanity and singular goodness to mankind; is a constitution which it is so *unnatural* in *men* to object to, that it seems on the other hand to be the wisest and best sentiment the reason of men could possibly offer up in request to the supreme Being, That he would vouchsafe to grant them the privilege of such a constitution, and of having their actions tried, and their future condition determined, by such a judge.

FOURTHLY: We see, that the Providence of God hath *actually committed* the lives and condition of mankind in this world, to the will and determination of *men*, even corrupt and vicious men: and if we can reconcile *this* constitution to our reason and our best ideas of divine wisdom and goodness, and think *no objection* of force arises from hence against *natural* religion; our reason cannot be offended at that doctrine of revelation which declares, That *the Man Christ Jesus*, the most emi-

nent and perfect character in wisdom and virtue that ever appeared in the world, was raised from the dead, exalted to dominion, and appointed of God to be *the judge of quick and dead.*

FIFTHLY: If it appears to any an irrational and incredible supposition, that a being of a superior order and celestial dignity, and in comparison of man *in the form of a GOD*, should become incarnate and *be found in the fashion of a man*;— we may observe in answer, first, That there is no instance of our Saviour or any of his Apostles requiring any of their disciples or converts to receive and believe that doctrine. They require us to believe that *Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God, that he rose from the dead, and is ordained of GOD to be the judge of mankind*: but they do not require our belief of any thing concerning his dignity or existence, *previous* to his human appearance. That doctrine therefore is not to be ranked amongst the *Articles* of
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our *Christian Faith*. But if any unbeliever will still object that this doctrine is plainly intimated in some expressions of the *New Testament*, and that it is such a *mystery* as his reason cannot assent to, and hence is disposed to reject the *Christian Faith*; it may be a sufficient reply, if in the next place we demand of him, to explain the *mystery* of his own *incarnation*, and the union of his own soul and body, and to teach human reason to comprehend the manner of *that*: 'till then, we can neither on the one hand allow any force or weight to such an objection; nor on the other, presume to assert or explain any thing concerning our *Saviour's* incarnation.

THE folly and arrogance of some men have tempted them to advance and maintain, with an amazing degree of assurance, certain propositions concerning the *person* or *essence* of our Saviour, and his state of glory and dignity before his coming into this world.—But let us be contented to
receive

receive the Gospel, in that plainness and simplicity in which it was first delivered, free from every mixture of *metaphysical* notions: and then we shall find no great difficulty in defending the truth of it, and may be able to give a reason of the Faith and hope that is in us.—The *Apostle Peter*, immediately after the effusion of the *Holy Spirit*, delivers the Faith of the Gospel to the unbelieving Jews in these words: *Acts ii. 22. Ye men of Israel, hear these words.—Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of GOD amongst you, by miracles and wonders and signs, which GOD did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of GOD, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: this Jesus GOD hath raised up; whereof we all are witnesses: therefore being by the right hand of GOD exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit; he hath communicated these miraculous gifts to us, which you now see and hear. Therefore let all the house*
of

of Israel know assuredly, that GOD hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, Lord and Christ.——He delivers the christian Faith in the same manner to the heathen officer Cornelius in the context: That GOD anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil: for GOD was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the country of Judea and the city of Jerusalem: whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him GOD raised up the third day, and shewed him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before of GOD, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead: and he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify, that it is He who was ordained of GOD to be the judge of quick and dead: to him give all the prophets witness; that thro' his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

SIXTHLY :

SIXTHLY: That the miraculous operation of some Being superior in power and goodness to mankind, should accompany the discourses, actions, life, and death of our Lord, in pursuance of so great and benevolent a purpose, as the resurrection of men to another life, and their eternal happiness; is not only credible, but will appear the *more credible*, the *more* we attend to the constitution of nature; and consider the mysterious and properly speaking miraculous operation of divine power, in producing numberless animals into existence for the lower purposes of this life. If we know by *sense* the one to be *fact*; we may with *reason* believe the other to be *probable*.

SEVENTHLY: All men who believe a future state, believe already the greatest of *mysteries* and of *miracles*, which, exclusive of the *testimony* of the Gospel, is beyond all *human experience*: and the credibility of which depends on some moral probabilities,

con-

concerning the unrevealed intention of the Almighty Maker of mankind. And we may safely appeal to every impartial mind, that has given any serious attention to the writings of the New Testament; whether the doctrine of a future immortal life, as represented there, and founded on the *experimental* evidence of our Lord's resurrection, is not rendered more reasonable and credible, than by any other account that ever was or can be given.

AND lastly: We know nothing more worthy of the Supreme Governor of the world, according to our natural apprehensions, than to distinguish, honour, and reward the greatest virtue in a signal and exemplary manner. And according to the Gospel-account, the exaltation of our Saviour to the throne of glory and of final judgment over mankind, was in consequence and *reward* of his inestimable *virtue*. He was therefore a most illustrious example of obedience to God, and of his consequent

consequent favour; not only to *men* on earth who receive the *Gospel*, but to all those *Superior Beings* who were witnesses of the great transaction.

To sum up the whole in a short compass:

—Nature and reason lead us to apprehend, that there is a benevolence in the Almighty Maker to his creatures of the human species, and that mankind as a collective body are an object of his care and goodness. And undoubtedly, raising them to another life is to be esteemed a greater effect of his beneficence, than any effect in this world, or than his creating them for this life only. And as the Providence of God *by man* brings men into this world, and *by man* sustains, instructs, governs, and judges them in this life; *as by man, sin, and death entered into this world; so by man comes also the resurrection of the dead*: by man mankind are raised to another life and judged according to their works, and sin, misery, and death destroyed in another world:

world: and as in this natural life mankind descend from and are born in the nature and likeness of the *first man Adam*, who was made of the dust of the earth; so when they are born again or raised from the dead to another life, it will be in the nature and likeness of *that second man who is the Lord from Heaven*, the Father of the life to come: for tho' it doth not yet appear, says the *Apostle John*, *what we shall be: we know that when he shall appear we shall be made like him*: and the *Apostle Paul*, *that as we now bear the image of the earthly, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly, of Him who was himself the first fruits of them that slept, the first-born from the dead, the first-born of the whole new creation of God*, who is gone before into the invisible regions, to prepare *Mansions* for them that follow him, and who will return to judge the whole world and put all virtuous souls into possession of an everlasting life.

THE first cause of all things, the one Almighty Sovereign, the blessed and only

potentate, who alone hath immortality in himself, is infinitely above all other powers and potentates in all *other* worlds as well as in *this*: and the councils of his eternal government are accomplished by those persons and powers which his providence raises up and appoints: and the wisdom of his appointments is often above all human penetration. But if we were not able to discover so much of divine wisdom in this constitution revealed in the *Gospel*; yet nothing seems more evidently adapted to human nature, or a more proper ground of consolation and hope, than the belief, that our final judgement and eternal condition is committed to one who has had experience of human life, its infirmities, difficulties and temptations.

THE discourses, actions, and events recorded of our Saviour in his human state, are as it were so many *pledges* or securities given to us of his wisdom, justice, and clemency, and (if it be a proper expression) of his *humanity*,

manity in the administration of the final judgment. What a source of comfort and hope is here, to creatures endued with the infirmities of flesh and blood, and oppressed with a conscious sense of their own demerits! What a subject of courage and joy in exerting our best endeavours of piety and virtue! By whose judgment would men wish to have their eternal state decided, were it left to their *own election*; or what other person in the universe can human reason or imagination conceive as *more eligible* to this high and glorious office than *the man Christ Jesus*; who qualified himself for it, by performing the hardest duties, and sustaining the severest trials, of our mortal nature, even to the bitterest pains of death, from a principle of obedience to God and love to mankind?—*Therefore GOD hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name, in this world or that which is to come: And he hath committed all judgment unto him, and given him*

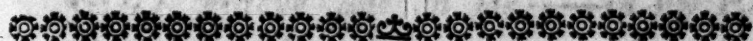
the power of eternal life and death over the whole human race.

WILL *He* who pleaded the ignorance of his own murderers in apology for their crime, be severe upon the failings and errors that proceed from mere human weakness and involuntary ignorance? Will *He* who implored mercy and forgiveness from his Almighty Father for his own most cruel persecutors, punish with rigour and beyond the measure of justice? Will he who came *to seek and to save that which was lost*, condemn any, by arbitrary purpose, or without a necessity of justice, to the loss of eternal life? Will not *He* who *himself* endured the most unjust oppression, vindicate the cause of the injured and oppressed? And will not *He*, who by humility, virtue, and obedience to God, rose to glory and dominion, distinguish and prefer men according to their piety and virtue?

AND

AND it should strongly affect the mind of every christian in reading or hearing the instructions and precepts of our Saviour, to consider that they are delivered by the *same* person, who is constituted the future *judge* of our behaviour.—There cannot be a more natural and powerful motive to a virtuous and christian life than this consideration. His precepts and example come recommended to our consciences with a redoubled influence of reason and authority, from his exaltation to the throne of judgment, and the power committed to him of punishing our negligence and rewarding our observance. This doctrine alone contains the strongest motives and the highest encouragement, to excite our attention and animate our endeavours in *christian* goodness, to make us *stedfast and immoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord*, having such an *assurance that our christian labour shall not be in vain*.—If we live as becomes his disciples and followers, we may with joy expect *the blessed hope, even*

the appearance of the glory of the great GOD and of our Saviour Jesus Christ: when he shall come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels, and sit upon the throne of judgment, and make the universal and final distinction and separation: when the wicked shall be punished with everlasting destruction from his presence and by his glorious power; and the righteous enter into his joy, possess his kingdom, and live for ever with him in the Mansions he is preparing, and which were designed for them from the foundation of the world.



DISCOURSE XIII.

Philosophical and Christian Views,
of the Future State.



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DISCOURS E. XLII.

of the Future State

JOHN xiv. 1.

Let not your hearts be troubled: ye believe in GOD, believe also in me.—In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also.

THESE words are the beginning of that private and affectionate discourse, which our Lord held with his disciples, the evening in which he was going to be betrayed and put to death. The dignity of the speaker, the character and situation of his disciples, and the solemn and interesting occasion of the words spoken, are all proper to engage our earnest attention to them. Our Lord had often foretold the approaching event: but his disciples seem not to have understood him;

or at least, not to be fully convinced 'till the present time; when at the celebration of the *passover*, he assured them of the immediate accomplishment of it, in such a manner, that they could not possibly doubt or mistake his meaning any longer. Then all their expectations were contradicted, all their hopes blasted, their prejudices excited, and their Faith overcome: they were filled with consternation, grief and despair. The ample experience which they had of the wisdom of his instructions, the power of his miracles, and the charms of his goodness, only served to produce a *violent struggle* in their breasts, between the esteem and affection they conceived for him, and the terrible disappointment and mortification of seeing him apprehended and put to death like a miserable malefactor, instead of raising himself and them to honour and grandeur. One of them indeed had the courage to declare that he would die with his master rather than desert him. But tho' he might be sincere in making the declaration-

claration, he did not know his own weakness: his master knew him better than he knew himself. Now in this dejected and spiritless state of his disciples was this discourse of our Lord addressed to them; and every expression in it was directed to their inmost thoughts and affections; and it is throughout full of an inimitable dignity of sentiment, simplicity of manner, kindness of disposition, and propriety of address. His view was to strengthen their Faith, to mitigate their grief, and to revive their hopes. To which end, tho' he could not avoid some mysterious appearances, because they were not qualified to receive a fuller information; yet we may observe, that he gives them many plain and strong assurances; "That he would
" return to them again; that his death
" would not be their loss, but their great
" advantage; that they were to be separated
" for a while only in order to be united for
" ever; that he would in the mean time
" send them another *comforter* to supply
" the want of his presence; that his power
" and

“ and inclination to befriend them would
“ always continue; that he was leaving
“ them and going into another state in or-
“ der to provide for them; that in a short
“ time they would see him again, and their
“ grief be changed into joy; and he would
“ then remove all their doubts, explain
“ things more clearly, and give them an
“ entire and lasting satisfaction.” He in-
termingles also many expressions of kind-
ness to them and persuasions to fidelity,
steadiness, and courage, and to an obser-
vance of all that he had taught them, and
a confidence in the promises he was then
making, and of which they would most
assuredly experience the truth. Such ap-
pears to be the purport of his discourse in
this and the following chapter.

BUT to consider the text more particu-
larly.—*Let not your hearts be troubled: ye
believe in GOD, believe also in me.—In my Fa-
ther's house are many mansions: if it were not
so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a
place for you. And if I go and prepare a place
for*

for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am there ye may be also.

—Words than which nothing can be imagined more affecting or consolatory. Our Lord reasons with his disciples, in order to support their faith: “ That, as
“ they believed in God who is invisible,
“ from the evidence of his works which
“ they saw; so the works of power and
“ goodness which himself had performed
“ amongst them were sufficient for their
“ faith and confidence in him, tho’ he was
“ then about to depart from them and to
“ be invisible for a time: nor ought his
“ suffering death greatly to alarm and dis-
“ quiet them, as if he was going to perish
“ or to be separated from them for ever,
“ or as if his pretensions of being
“ the Messiah, and their hopes of his
“ rising to power and glory and be-
“ coming their prince and deliverer, would
“ be defeated. For this world is not
“ the only scene of existence and life, or of
“ honour and power. In the universe of
“ God’s

“ God’s creation there are numberless dif-
 “ ferent worlds and places of residence:
 “ and death would be to him only a pas-
 “ sage into another state, where he would
 “ have an opportunity of employing his
 “ care and power for the greater advan-
 “ tage of his disciples: and the very in-
 “ tent of his leaving them at present, and
 “ going into that other state, was to dis-
 “ pose things for their reception; after
 “ which he would come again and translate
 “ them into it, and they should dwell to-
 “ gether with him for ever.” — In this
 manner doth our Saviour cheer his despond-
 ing disciples, opening their understand-
 ings, confirming their belief, and reviving
 their hopes.

THE principal points which the words of
 the text propose to our attention are the
 following.—First, The representation which
 our Saviour makes of the universe and the
 invisible world: *In my Father’s house are*
many mansions, that is, various states or
 worlds.

worlds. Secondly, The assertion of his own power and agency in providing a future state for his followers: *I am going to prepare a place for you*, that is, another state or world. Thirdly, That this state will be where he himself resides.—And fourthly, That the end and design of his whole procedure was to prepare this future state:—*I am going to prepare a place for you: and if I go, or, when I am gone and have prepared a place for you, I will return and receive you to myself, that where I am there ye may be also.*

FIRST: We are to consider the representation which our Saviour here makes to his disciples of the universe and the invisible world: *In my Father's house are many mansions.*—It is a character peculiar to our Lord's discourses that he expresseth the fullest sense and the most sublime sentiments with the greatest simplicity and familiarity of language. As with great justice and propriety he frequently styles the

the Supreme Being *Father*; so here, in pursuance of the same image, he stiles the creation, the *house* of his Father, in which he saith there are many *mansions*, various different scenes or places of residence for his different creatures. Now from these words, as well as from philosophical reasoning and speculation, we may learn to enlarge our ideas of the works of God, and to extend our views further into his immense creation.

MANKIND born into the present world, confined to the surface of the earth, limited by the imperfect organs of sense and by a narrow sphere of experience, see but very little, and know still less, of the boundless works of the Almighty Creator. What knowledge the minutest insect confined to its little cell hath of the whole earth and of all the tribes of men and other animals, such in proportion is *our* knowledge of the surrounding system of the universe.

BUT

BUT as we see the earth replenished with numberless animals, of various forms and in different states and conditions; as we see a regular gradation in the various species of creatures, from the lowest insect to the highest of mankind; so it is reasonable to believe that all the living creatures which inhabit the earth bear no proportion in number to the living inhabitants of the universe in general; and that as mankind are raised in capacity, dignity, and enjoyment above the lower animals; so there are creatures of ranks and orders ascending above us, in an undeterminable gradation: and as this earth is the appointed residence and bounded habitation of mankind, the limits of which they cannot pass; so there are innumerable other worlds and regions infinitely various, each possessed and replenished with its own proper inhabitants.

THE late discoveries of natural philosophers extend so far, that they acknowledge
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with one consent and belief, that there are many material globes or worlds situated in the vast spaces, but within the reach of the human eye, which have so great an affinity and resemblance to the world we inhabit, as to afford the strongest presumption, that they are in like manner replete with their own proper and living inhabitants, who derive support and benefit like ourselves from the light and heat of the same sun. And if the material system be of this nature and extent; if the immeasurable spaces of the skies afford room for various worlds of unknown dimension and quality; 'tis not incredible, that there are also numberless systems or states of being in the universe; which are not nor can be subject to any of our senses, and of which it is impossible for us at present to form any the least imagination or conception.

It is impossible for a person born blind to form the least idea or conception of light and colours: and when the sense of
seeing

seeing is added to him, he is then brought into a new and higher state and capacity of action and enjoyment. So the almighty power of God may give to other creatures, for ought we know, faculties, of which we have not the least conception, or may translate any of his creatures into a new and higher state of existence, and impart to them powers and means of enjoyment and happiness, of which they could not before frame any notion to themselves, but we may conclude with the highest probability, that every species and rank of beings throughout the universe possesses mansions, regions, spheres of activity, objects and means of happiness, suitable to their respective natures and qualities.—Such order and disposition of things we naturally apprehend to proceed from the perfect wisdom of the supreme author and disposer of all.

FURTHER, we see the changeable and revolving nature of all things on earth: one

neration passing away in order to give room and place to another: And amongst mankind, some ascending and others descending in the scale of human life: some arising from ignorance, meanness, and obscurity, to knowledge, honour, power, and other possessions: some degrading themselves to contempt and misery by their vices; others improving themselves and attaining the true dignity and happiness of their nature by virtue. So in regard to a more extensive system, consisting of many different ranks of rational beings, or in regard to the whole universe, it is not unreasonable to suppose, that there may be an endless variety of changes and revolutions: that one world or system of worlds is in the course of ages succeeded by another: that some creatures are continually ascending, and others perhaps descending in the infinite scale of rational being: that there are various migrations or translations of creatures, into different states or scenes of habitation, and different
degrees

degrees of capacity and enjoyment: and, considering the infinite multiplicity of the works of God and variety of his living creatures, that there are also different periods of duration, as well as different states of being, assigned to them; that some are created for a short and *momentary* existence, others for a *longer* period, and others for an *eternal* duration.

It is likewise agreeable to our best apprehensions of the orders and designs of Almighty God exercising a moral government over all and every species or system of rational beings, to conclude, that it is the fundamental and immutable rule or law of this his moral empire, That, by virtue and obedience to his will, his rational creatures shall rise to higher states and nobler scenes of action, and to superior degrees of capacity honour and happiness; whilst on the other hand, the consequence of vice and disobedience shall be their degradation, or *forfeiture* of their former state privileges and enjoyments,

and a suffering of loss disgrace and misery; and if they remain *incorrigible*, that the end shall be their *utter destruction*; whilst other creatures more fit and worthy shall succeed to their state place and rank in the creation, and numbers newly created replenish the waste and loss of numbers in the universe, who are destroyed in just consequence and punishment of their wickedness and impenitence.

THE creative power of God is unlimited: and we may reasonably conclude, that it is perpetually operating in the production of new creatures into existence and life: and when millions perish, how easily can his almighty power produce equal or greater numbers in their stead?--
For to him it belongs to kill or to make alive, to save or to destroy. He is the everlasting GOD, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth, who fainteth not, neither is weary: There is no searching out of his power or his understanding.

WITH

WITH regard to ourselves and the whole human species, it is not to be presumed that we can comprehend all the various ends and wise purposes which the almighty Creator had in view in the formation of mankind: and therefore it may be difficult if not impossible to judge with certainty from reason and speculation alone, what is his design in regard to our *duration*; or to determine that most important question, whether mankind are totally destroyed by death; or whether they shall survive that mortal change, and pass into another state. But supposing we could determine to our own satisfaction, that, in general, death does not put an end to our being, but that we shall pass into some other state; yet how many doubts, how many difficult questions still remain unresolved, and indeed unresolvable by any arguments in the power of human reason to produce. If the light of nature does afford some glimmering hopes, some dubious intimations and presages, of a future state; yet how

blank is the prospect! what *shadows clouds* and *darkness* rest upon it! impenetrable to human eyes, and uninvestigable by our most curious researches!

BUT is it not natural to extend our enquiries further? can we help being solicitous to know, whether there is any *place prepared* to receive us after death? any particular regions, any habitations or *mansions*, appointed to us in the universe of God? when our souls launch into the boundless ocean of unknown being, shall they wander solitary and forlorn thro' the abyss of immensity and eternity? or who will be our pilot and conductor? whose friendly guidance and immediate protection may we hope for? to whose territories shall we arrive? to whose government and jurisdiction shall we be subject? with what society shall we claim acquaintance? or shall we be lost in the deserts of the creation, having no place of refuge, no home

or

or habitation, no friends, no Saviour, protector, and governor?—

It is indeed readily acknowledged, that in all states and at all events we are and shall be under the care and government of the one infinite and supreme being: without which belief there can be no hope; and which is the necessary foundation of every thing we can hope for,—But when we consider on the other hand, that it may be as truly affirmed of the most destitute miserable and abandoned creatures in the universe, as of ourselves, that they are within the power and providence of almighty God; and likewise, that to suppose that mankind will be provided for in a future state by the immediate hand and power of almighty God, is an hypothesis we have no ground to make from the visible scene and course of things in this world, but is *contrary* to all appearances at present; seeing we derive in this world, life, preservation, deliverances, protection, and

all provisions and blessings of life, not immediately from God, but by the mediation of others:—when we consider all this, the doctrine of God's universal power and providence over all creatures in all states, will not, *alone* and abstractly considered, afford us all that satisfaction concerning a future state which we naturally desire, and which may be a proper and sufficient ground for our conduct in life, and our hope and courage at death. For if there be a world to come, it is *not* to be presumed that the œconomy of things in *that world*, is not only different from, but *contrary* to, all the methods of divine œconomy which we see in *this world*: at least no appearances of providence *here* will lead us to conceive of *such* a divine procedure *hereafter*, or to believe *such a kind* of future state.

—ON the contrary; as we are born and live in this world by the mediation and assistance of others, and owe all our safety support and enjoyments to the care and
in

instruction, to the power and goodness of others; so from all that we see and know of the divine conduct and designs, it is natural to conclude, that a similar œconomy and dispensation must take place in a future world; and that our resurrection after death, our safety or salvation in a future state, our mansion or place of residence, our manner of life, our enjoyments and felicities, and every thing relative to that state, will be under the care direction and government, not immediately of the supreme being, but of some *subordinate* agent and minister.—And the whole constitution and process of things in this world, upon the most impartial and extensive view, lead us to apprehend, that if mankind are to live after death, and God hath appointed a world to come for them, there is some *mediator between GOD and man*, some deliverer, protector and governor, to whose immediate care and tuition mankind are committed, as the special and distinguished friend and patron

tron of the human race; and by whose powerful agency and wise direction, all things relative to our future and eternal state shall be transacted and accomplished.

HERE then shall we not gratefully accept of the aid, and acknowledge the favour of the *christian* revelation? which gives us a better assurance and more information concerning a future state, than we could attain to by the light of nature; and consequently establishes our belief of it in a superior manner and degree. It informs us, by whose immediate care inspection and agency all things relating to our future existence are transacted and governed;—That it is *Jesus Christ our Lord*, who hath power and commission from God, to deliver us from the power and dominion of death, to afford us protection and safety, and to provide for us convenient *habitations* after we have quitted these earthly dwellings. *He is our resurrection and our life*, and our future state is under his

his government and appointment. To this end, and that we might believe in him, and rely on his care and protection, even in the article of death, *GOD raised him from the dead*; and in reward of his most perfect and exemplary virtue and obedience, hath given him power over *all flesh*, committed to him the *keys* of the future world, and constituted him *judge* over mankind, *that he might give eternal life to all good men*.

THIS leads us to consider, secondly, the assertion of our Saviour in the text, concerning his own power and office of preparing a future state for his followers:—

I am going to prepare a place for you.

THE idea of an *intermediate power* between the one supreme and infinite being and his minute creatures on earth; *a power*, friendly and benevolent to the human species; *a person*, who hath experienced the infirmities of our nature, and exhibited every

every human virtue, who hath himself passed before us from *this* life thro' the gulph of death to *another*, whose peculiar charge and province, whose most affectionate concern and important enterprize, is the salvation of mankind;—nothing surely can be more grateful to the heart of man, than *this* idea of a *mediator* and *Saviour*; nothing more consonant to our amplest views of the vast universe, and the ways of infinite wisdom, than *this* faith of the Gospel.

—As the power of omnipotence does not produce the glorious light of the day, but by the operation of the sun; as his unerring wisdom does not bring mankind into this world, but by the intervention of man; as his infinite goodness does not bestow any blessings of this life, but by *intermediate* benefactors; so neither will divine power wisdom and goodness raise mankind from the dead, to the life the light and happiness of a world to come,

but

but by the beneficent operation of an *intermediate* power; of *him*, who is revealed to us as the great benefactor and *Saviour* of men, the author of a future state, *the resurrection and the life*, to the world of mankind.

AND when we consider the mysterious and momentous nature of that change, which will befall us at death, the impenetrable veil which hides futurity from our view, and the untried unknown expansion that lies beyond, when at the moment of our departure we are separated from every present object, and deserted of every human acquaintance, and no earthly power can befriend or relieve us; in this real prospect of death (for real it is) what can give us so much consolation, so cheering hopes, as to believe that our souls shall not wander desolate, friendless, forsaken, absorbed in a void or chaos of solitary existence, but that there is a *place prepared* for us, a society ready to receive us, a
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propitious power appointed to protect us, to order our state and assign our habitation; that there is a *kingdom* and territory subject to the government of a *potentate* most friendly to mankind, who will not fail to give all virtuous souls an hospitable and kind reception, and a sincere welcome to his celestial dominions; a *potentate*, whose government was erected and established to the very end and purpose of saving mankind, and providing for the spirits of the just happy seats of residence: that amidst the infinite universe and the innumerable *variety* of states and worlds in it, there is *one* designed for the perpetual inheritance of good men, and prepared for their reception, by the care and agency of *our blessed Saviour*, whose high *imperial office* it is, to raise mankind from the dead, to judge them, and to put the righteous into possession of *that everlasting kingdom*.

AND

AND it may add greatly to our satisfaction to be assured, thirdly, that it will be the same state in which our Saviour himself resides. *I am going, saith he, to prepare a place for you: and when I have prepared a place for you, I will return and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also.*—As good men shall be raised from death in the likeness of their risen Saviour, and *their bodies shall be fashioned according to his glorious body, by that mighty power by which he is able to subdue every thing to himself*; so they will be united into one celestial assembly and community with him their exalted head, under his government, in that region or world of residence, where his everlasting throne is fixed, where he shines with ineffable glory, and will for ever employ his wisdom and power for the happiness of his subjects, now redeemed by him from sin and death, and clothed with immortality.

LASTLY : this was the great end of all his actions and sufferings, of his whole procedure and enterprize, that he might become the author of this immortal happiness to good men, that he might obtain this celestial province jurisdiction and government, that he might establish this mysterious intimate indissoluble connexion and relation between himself and the world of mankind ; when all virtuous souls, the *sons of the resurrection* shall be formed into one vast community, city, or *church*, the object of his eternal care and love ; as he will be the object of their admiration esteem gratitude and obedience, to everlasting ages. Then will they also stand in a resemblance to, and perpetual alliance with, that order of superior beings, who are now spectators of human affairs, and who will be combined under the direction of the Saviour of mankind, in accomplishing with him *the great salvation* ; when he shall send forth his angels, and
they

they shall gather his elect from all parts of the world.

It is not possible that a future state, and the happiness of it, can be represented to human thought and conception, in a more intelligible and rational manner, in nobler images, or in sentiments more grateful to the heart of a good man than those which the writings of the *Gospel* convey to us.

We find in the *Gospel-revelation*, an experimental evidence in the actual resurrection of our Lord from the dead; an *apparatus* presented to our view; celestial agents introduced; miraculous powers exhibited; a state of residence prepared; a heavenly community formed; an eternal government established; and the great sovereign and Saviour of mankind revealed, with a sublime dignity, yet a familiar and perfect humanity; his actions seen, his discourses heard, his divine virtue proved, his person distinguished, not indeed with earthly

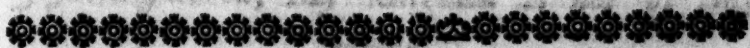
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pomp, but a heavenly power, not with the grandeur of this life, but a far more important and glorious resurrection to a superior life; whence he became the example, the pledge, the leader, the author of a general and final resurrection of mankind, the appointed judge of human actions, the rewarder of the righteous, the everlasting admiration and joy of his redeemed in the mansion of his glory.

HAVING these sublime and joyful truths revealed to us; it becomes us *to set our affections on things above, where Christ sitteth*, invested with glory and dominion; knowing *that our future life is hid with Christ in GOD, and that when he who is our life shall appear, then shall his followers appear also with him in glory.* By this hope we are animated to follow his example of humility, charity, resignation, patience, contempt of riches, obedience to God, and benevolence to men. For by thus *dying to sin, and living to righteousness* in this world, we shall assuredly

surely obtain a resurrection to another life, be found *worthy*, as our Lord expresses it, of *that world* which he hath prepared, and *have an entrance administred unto us into his everlasting kingdom.*—And in consequence of this *Christian Faith* and obedience, we need *not let our hearts be troubled* at the prospect of our own death, nor *sorrow* for the loss of our friends and relations, as if we had no *hope*; but may enjoy at present a solid consolation and reviving hope, amidst all the afflictions of mortality; and may at last with a calm and secure confidence resign our departing spirits to the merciful disposal of our Saviour; in certain *hope* of an admission into that happy state where he resides, and of *being for ever with the Lord.*

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DISCOURSE XIII.

The Principal Objection to the Gospel answered.



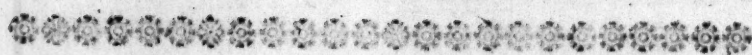
little if at all amended; and that even the nations called *Christian*, are for the most part as ignorant and superstitious, as corrupt and wicked, as the *Jews* or *Heathens* had been before.

And it may be allowed, that it would have been beyond our power to remove this objection, by any clear and satisfac-



DISCOURSE XIII.

The Principal Objection to the
Gospel answered.



343
JOHN xviii. 36.

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world.

IT hath been thought by some the strongest objection against the *Christian revelation*, That it hath not produced those great and good effects in the world which seem adequate to the dignity and design of a supernatural interposition; that instead of accomplishing a general reformation of mankind, the world is upon the whole but little if at all amended; and that even the nations called *Christian*, are for the most part as ignorant and superstitious, as corrupt and wicked, as the *Jews* or *Heathens* had been before.

AND it may be allowed, that it would have been beyond our power to remove this objection, by any clear and satisfac-

tory account, had not our *Blessed Saviour* and his *Apostles* themselves prevented all the force of it, and furnished us with a just solution; which they have done in so ample a manner, that not only the difficulty is removed, but the truth and authority of the *Gospel* is confirmed by the very inquiry.

For **FIRST:** Our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* not only declared, that the *Gospel* would not be effectual to reform mankind, and foretold in general the corruption and wickedness which would ensue notwithstanding the *Gospel-revelation*; but particularly predicted and described, in all the peculiar and principal characters, that very apostacy and corruption of the *Christian* nations, which hath given rise to the foregoing objection: predictions, which cannot with any colour of reason be attributed to any human penetration and foresight, much less to any natural sagacity of such men as the *Apostles* were. For tho' it is absurd to expect pre-

predictions so plain beforehand, as to operate to the prevention of the very consequences predicted, and so to destroy themselves; yet they describe with a surprising plainness and perspicuity (1.) The extent of this grand apostacy; as comprehending *ten kingdoms*: (2.) The duration of it; as lasting *1260 years*: (3.) The capital seat of it; *viz. that city which stood upon seven hills and then reigned over the Kings of the earth*; which could be no other city in the world than Rome: (4.) The tyranny of it; *as drunk with blood, making war upon the Saints, even them that kept the testimony of Jesus*; that is, carrying on religious wars, persecuting and massacring the true christians who maintained their fidelity and refused to comply with the prevailing corruptions: (5.) The policy of it; *as confounding the understandings of princes and of whole nations, as it were by arts of Sorcery, and by administering to them intoxicating potions*: (6.) The fraud and falsehood of it; *as forging and publishing false miracles*

acles and *lying wonders* without end: (7.) The distinguished doctrines and institutions of it; as *prohibiting marriage*, commanding to *abstain from meats*; maintaining *idolatry* and practising *Dæmon-Worship*; that is, the invocation of departed spirits: (8.) The grandeur and pomp, the pride and arrogance of the great *head* of this apostacy; as displaying a vast magnificence, as *contending with, and exalting himself above, all that is called GOD or is worshipped, sitting in the temple of GOD, and shewing himself that he is a God*; that is, claiming a power to pardon sins, and to dispense with all laws divine as well as human (which is indeed assuming a power over God) presiding visibly in the church, and openly demanding the Faith and obedience which are due to God alone: (9.) And lastly, the very title which is the pretended ground of right to all his authority, namely, as *Christ's Vicar or substitute* on earth, which exactly answers to the Greek word *Antichrist*.—Other circumstances might be mentioned:

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but these are all so bold strokes, so peculiar and distinguished features, that the picture cannot possibly be mistaken or misapplied. And unless we imagine that the *Apostles* of our *Saviour* drew these extraordinary characters at a venture, and that by chance things fell out afterwards as extraordinarily to answer them; here is evidently such an argument for the truth of the *Christian revelation*, as more than ballances any objections arising from any strange event of things since the publication of the *Gospel*. Here is a state of things, it must be confessed, directly contrary to what the *Apostles* tell us *ought to be* amongst professed *Christians*; but exactly agreeable to what they foretel us *would be*: here is a *kingdom* erected under the name of *Christ*, but as different from the real *kingdom of Christ*, as darkness is from light: The former is a worldly dominion, founded on fraud and falsehood, exercised with tyranny, productive of all corruption and wickedness: the latter is *not of this world*; and there are no
other

other signs or effects of it on earth, but truth, virtue and charity; and wherever these are found, there is in some degree a specimen and commencement of our Saviour's kingdom.

SECONDLY: The truth and excellence of any doctrine or institution of religion is to be judged of independently of the moral conduct of those who profess it. The most perfect institution cannot insure the morals of mankind. On the contrary, it is itself always liable to be neglected, or mistaken, or, like gold, to be debased, or counterfeited by the artifices of corrupt men. As the wisest system of human laws cannot secure the political virtue of a nation, but being left to the execution of weak or wicked men, may be neglected or perverted; so may any scheme of religion, tho' founded on divine truth and authority, be equally abused, when left to the voluntary use and application of men.

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- If the *Heathen*-corruption of natural religion is no real objection to the revelation of nature; neither is the *papal* or any other corruption of Christian religion, any objection to the revelation of the Gospel. — The law of nature is indeed the law of God; and it is right and perfect in itself; but it never was perfectly understood, much less practised, in any part of the world; and in most parts, was violated and perverted to an enormous degree, and even the most unnatural ideas and customs planted in its stead. *Christianity* is the *same* law of God enforced by additional principles and motives: but the same causes in human nature, which corrupted natural religion, have operated in like manner to violate and pervert *Christianity*, and to substitute the wicked inventions of men in its room. All this follows from the passions and lusts of mankind, from the artifice and fraud of deceivers, and from the weakness and folly of the deceived. And neither any system of laws, or doctrines of truth, or institutions

tions of worship, tho' ever so plainly derived from divine authority, whether discovered by reason, or delivered in the fullest terms of revelation, can secure mankind from the influence of those causes of corruption: nothing but a perpetual series of miraculous interpositions and judgments (such as that which struck *Ananias* and *Sapphira* dead, for attempting to pass a fraud upon the *Apostles*, or in reality upon the *Holy Spirit*) could be sufficient to this end. And even such a train of miracles would by their continuance lose their best effects, and come in time to be considered as no miracles at all.

THE actual reformation or virtue of mankind is by no means therefore a necessary condition, in order to prove the truth, either of natural religion, or of the *Christian* revelation. The truth of things should always be considered as independent on the opinions and practices of mankind: and we ought not to suffer any prejudices

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to arise in our minds, against any doctrine or institution, on account of the mistakes and abuses which it hath been subject to, by human fraud or folly, caprice or wickedness.

IN reality, a general reformation of mankind in any high degree, seems to be impracticable by any means whatsoever: the constitution of this world does not seem to admit of it. Human nature will still remain the same, and mankind are and always will be creatures beset with temptations, appetites, passions, errors, follies, and faults. *This world* is not a state, in which the virtue, peace, and happiness of mankind can ever be thoroughly established. So great a change, so happy a reformation, so divine an establishment, cannot take place but in *that state* or *world*, where our Blessed Saviour's *Kingdom* is established, that *everlasting kingdom* of his, into which all sincere and good men shall be finally admitted, and form one glorious

society under his protection and government.

THIRDLY: The reformation of mankind in this world is not represented in the writings of the *New Testament* as being the principal end and design of our Saviour's enterprize. The publication of the *Gospel* and the endeavours of the *Apostles* to promote its credit and influence in the world, were indeed directed to the instruction, conversion, and moral improvement of all who would give attention. But the reception and effect of the *Gospel* amongst mankind is only a *circumstance*, compared to the *great end* of our Saviour's whole undertaking: *which end* might have been accomplished in regard to mankind in general, tho' the *Gospel* had never been published at all: as it is now, in *fact*, accomplished, in regard to the far greater part of mankind, who have never yet received or heard of the *Gospel*; and who nevertheless shall obtain, if they live virtuously according to

the law of GOD written in their hearts, the great salvation of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

WHEN he himself was questioned in the most solemn manner upon his trial by the Roman governor, concerning his kingly character and pretensions; he avowed himself to be in reality a King; but added, *that his kingdom was not of this world: that he was born into and appeared in the world, that he might bear testimony to the truth; and that every one who is of the truth would hear his voice.* That is, he aimed at no government or influence, and came to effect no change in the state of the world, but such as that *truth*, to which he bore testimony, would produce: and every person who received that truth would indeed obey his commands. But this was a kind of influence and authority no way interfering with the government of *Pilate* or the empire of *Cæsar*, or prejudicial to the rights of any prince on earth.

OUR blessed *Saviour* exercises no regal or judicial power in this world. All that can be properly styled *his kingdom* on earth, is nothing more than the influence which the truth of the *Gospel* hath upon the minds and actions of men. And this truth he left to the voluntary acceptance or refusal, use or abuse, of mankind: and men themselves, not his gospel, are answerable for the consequences. He hath expressly disclaimed all *coercive* power over mankind in this life: and his *persuasive* power is left in the history and other parts of the *new testament*: which men may attend to, or, on the contrary, may neglect, despise, mistake, pervert, and abuse, just as they are disposed, without the least apprehension either of reward or punishment from *him* in *this* world. As far as the gospel serves to influence men to virtue; so far he intended to reform the world and to *bless men in turning them from their iniquities*, but no further. Excepting
this

this, the world goes on in its natural course; and fraud and folly, superstition and wickedness rule in it as much as ever.

HAD our *blessed Saviour* come with a sole or principal view to reform mankind in this life; he would have done what he expressly disclaimed; that is, he would have erected a government on earth: and we need not doubt but it would have been a perfect government, and have advanced the virtue and happiness of mankind, as high as human nature, and the constitution of *this* world could admit. But they will not admit of any high degrees. A government of perfect virtue, a community of compleat happiness, are impracticable *here*. *This* world *cannot* be converted and framed into an entire unmixed scene of knowledge, virtue, and happiness. But *another* world *may* be so framed: and mankind translated to another state and invested with a new na-

ture, may become wise, virtuous, and happy, in a manner and degree, of which their present nature and state are incapable: *for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of GOD, nor can corruption inherit incorruption.*—If any then suppose, that the main purpose of our Saviour's coming was to establish the virtue, peace, and happiness of men in this world; they are inattentive to what is represented as his great design and office, and do not understand the meaning of that *redemption which is in Christ Jesus our Lord*. He had a far greater end in view, than any thing which could be effected on earth; a more sublime and extensive enterprize, than any reformation or government of mankind in this life.

THIS leads to a fourth observation, which takes in the sense of the text: that our Saviour's great design and end was to provide a future state for mankind, to prepare another world for their residence, and to raise them

them from the dead to the possession of it, and there to establish his everlasting throne, kingdom and government.—Here is an effect worthy of a divine revelation, and every way answerable to the dignity of it, and to the miraculous intervention and operation of superior beings, in order to accomplish the glorious purpose.

A LIFE and world to come are derived to men from the power and goodness, the mediation and the agency, of the great *Redeemer* of the world, who saves men from *death eternal*, that is, from an utter extinction of being, and raises them to that life and state, that *inheritance* and *kingdom*, which are *his*, and which he prepares for and bestows on good men.—To this grand event the scriptures of the new testament constantly direct our attention, and represent it, in the fullest manner, as the purpose, end, and consummation of the scheme of *redemption*.

If we are prepossessed with opinions, that a future state is the natural birth-right of mankind, and that the souls of men are physically immortal or eternal; or that the almighty Creator either could not, or had some way bound himself that he never would, destroy or annihilate the human souls he hath made; if we entertain a previous notion, that a superior eternal life comes to mankind in the necessary course of things, independent of the operation and special agency of any superior power to that end; if we think that our salvation and happiness after death is effected by mechanical causes, and not by the mediation of intelligent agents; we shall find more difficulty in attaining to a clear understanding of the *Gospel*. But if we lay aside these vague, obscure, and prejudicate notions, and take our ideas and sentiments directly from the language of our Saviour and his apostles, we shall find it clearly intelligible: and shall then easily apprehend, that *the kingdom of our Saviour,*

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the kingdom of GOD, the kingdom of heaven, so often mentioned in the new testament, are one and the same thing with the *future state* of mankind.

JOHN the Baptist, the forerunner of our Saviour, preached saying, *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* And whilst our Saviour was living on earth, he taught, and ordered his *disciples* to teach, the same, viz. *the kingdom of heaven is at hand.* But after his resurrection, they never say it was *at hand*; because it was then actually come or commenced: the future state was then begun, *Christ* being *the first fruits of them that slept*: and as *Adam* was the first of mankind in this world, so our Lord was the first of mankind in the *resurrection-state* or the world to come, *the first-born from the dead*, the beginning of the new creation. At the last *passover* he declares to his disciples, *that he would no more taste of the fruit of the vine, till he should drink it with them anew in the kingdom of his Father*; that is, 'till after his resurrection,

when *the kingdom of GOD* was begun, and he then *eat and drank* with his disciples in his risen state.—The spread and influence of the *Gospel* in this world is indeed frequently signified by *the kingdom of GOD*: but it is always in connection with and reference to *that state* and world, which is properly and ultimately *the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour*; *that everlasting kingdom* into which all virtuous *christians* shall have *an abundant entrance administred to them*: *that kingdom*, into which *many shall come from the east and the west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*: *that kingdom*, in which *the righteous shall shine forth as the sun*, and which they shall obtain the perfect and eternal possession of, when *the king shall say unto them on his right hand, Come ye blessed of my father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world*: *that kingdom*, which our Lord received from the Father Almighty after his resurrection, when he was exalted, and had *all power given to him in heaven and*

on earth for the salvation of men : and finally, *that kingdom*, in which *He will rule 'till he hath put all enemies under his feet*, subdued all opposition, *destroyed the last enemy death*, and thoroughly established the virtue, peace, and happiness of it.—These are all descriptions of that future state and life, which is the effect of our Lord's mediatorial undertaking, the state of his residence, the scene of his glory, and the region of his empire, where his throne and government are for ever established.

THIS being the revelation of the *Gospel*, it is evident, that the general reformation of mankind, or their perfect peace and happiness in this world, are by no means essential parts of the plan of redemption, or consequences necessarily following from the truth of the christian revelation. Our Saviour's grand purpose, and his kingly office and empire, stand independent of the state of things in this world, and of all effects and consequences of his gospel

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published amongst men. We have indeed ground to hope, that the gospel will have, in some future ages, more extensive and beneficial effects, than it hath hitherto obtained: because the same spirit of prophecy, which predicted, in so strong and remarkable terms, the infatuation, corruption, and slavery of the christian nations, hath foretold also, as clearly, their deliverance and *reformation*: a reformation which hath already taken place in a considerable degree in some nations, as we have the happiness to experience: and all wise christians are waiting the conduct of providence, in order to the accomplishment of the whole, in an universal change of the *christian* world, and the conversion of the *Jews* and other nations: and this will be, in a religious sense, the *kingdom* and *glory* of our *Saviour* on earth. But even *this state* of things will be no more than a faint resemblance, or shadow, of his real, proper and everlasting *kingdom*, and of no greater importance, than as it

shall

shall conduce to qualify men for *that future state*, which is in the proper and full sense *the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour*. And the qualifications for *that state* may be found amongst mankind in every age and nation, tho' the *Gospel* be not received, known, or heard of amongst them.—So our Lord declares, *that many shall come from the east and the west, the north and the south, from all parts of the world, and possess his kingdom*, that is, the future state and world, whilst many *children of the kingdom*, many who now enjoy the *Gospel*, shall be excluded.—It is undoubtedly our high privilege to know this *Gospel of the kingdom of heaven*, and to have the *glad tidings of this great salvation* published for our acceptance, and confirmed to our belief by the *resurrection of our Saviour from the dead*, that grand event, which was the actual commencement of a future state, as well as the signal proof of it: but this privilege may be neglected and fatally abused; and will have no effect in itself,
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separate from an improvement or abuse of it, in determining our future condition.

THE wise or foolish conduct of *christians* in this view, is represented in a most natural and lively figure, according to his peculiar and inimitable manner, by *our Lord* himself. *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened to ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom: and five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps, &c.* By the *kingdom of heaven*, he means, the future state: by the *bridegroom* he characterizes *himself*, as he will then appear, not in the form and manner in which he lived on earth, but in splendor and magnificence, like a *prince* entertaining his friends and attendants at a *nuptial* solemnity: by the *virgins* going forth to meet the *bridegroom*, he denotes all *christians* who
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profess a veneration for him, and seem to prepare for and attend his *grand appearance*: and they are of two sorts, the *wise* and the *foolish*: the *foolish* are contented with the name and profession of christianity, without moral virtue: but the *wise* are solicitous to maintain that internal religion and virtue, without which, an outward profession is of no more significance, than a *lamp* without *oil*: and the consequence is, the exclusion of the one sort from, and admission of the other into, *the presence and joy of their Lord*.

It is needless to explain, or to add, any other passages or expressions of the *new testament*. The whole language of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles* will convince every attentive reader, that tho' the state of true religion and the influence of the *Gospel* in this world, is sometimes stiled *the kingdom of heaven*, as being preparatory to the future state; yet it is the *future state alone*,
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that life and world, to which all good men shall be translated, that is always meant by *the kingdom of Christ*, whenever our Lord's personal residence, or power, or government, or judgment, or glory, or joy, or the rewards he will bestow on good men, are comprehended.

To conclude: if the grand design and effect of our *Saviour's* enterprize was not to rectify all disorders, and establish the perfect virtue and happiness of mankind, in this world, not to mold human nature anew in this life; but to raise mankind from the dead, to provide another state and world for the residence and happiness of the good, and there establish his glorious and *everlasting kingdom*; it highly becomes all who believe this *Gospel*, it is our greatest advantage, and if we have a right consideration of things, will be our greatest delight, to extend our views and affections to that future state.

THE present nature and present state of mankind, or this world and its inhabitants, are undoubtedly fitted to each other by unerring wisdom. And whilst this world is upon the whole as good as the best men, and far better than the worst, deserve; it is no other than a senseless impiety, the offspring of pride and ingratitude, to be always complaining of our lot, neither enjoying the good things of life with thankfulness, nor bearing the calamities of it with patience.—In this view, every one ought to be satisfied with *present things*, and acknowledge the goodness of the almighty Creator, in bringing him into this life and world, so good and happy in the whole.

BUT if the power and virtue of the great Redeemer is exerted, by commission from the Father Almighty, to provide another and a better world, for the peculiar and eternal inheritance of good men, is it not an inestimable accumulation of di-

vine goodness? Should it not be thought *tidings of great joy*? Should it not raise our ardent hopes and desires, and excite our endeavours of preparation for the possession of it? After such an authentic discovery and *annunciation* of a world superior and eternal, the reward of virtue; what is there in this world to engross our attention, and make us unmindful of *the great salvation*, and *the promised inheritance*?

—This world cannot be made a state of happiness, either great in degree, or lasting in duration. Mankind are necessarily incident to vices, disorders, corruptions, calamities, diseases, and death: and there is no remedy: it is the proper state of our present corruptible nature. To establish the wisest government and greatest happiness that mankind are capable of in this world, would have been a design below the dignity of our Saviour, and unequal to the extent of his power and goodness. And we ought to rejoice much more in the gospel-account of a fu-

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ture state, than if our Saviour had erected the most perfect empire possible here on earth. For undoubtedly men may become capable of a happiness in another and immortal life, such as they can neither enjoy, nor so much as comprehend, at present. We have therefore the strongest reason to be satisfied, that the reward of good men is not in *this* world, but in *that*, where our *exalted Saviour* resides, and over which he rules with an *eternal scepter* of perfect justice and goodness.

THE *practice* of men often shews the great strength of their *faith* and *hope* in a prospect of temporal interest; when they risk their worldly *all*, upon an uncertain expectation of gaining, not a *kingdom*, but a small return of profit.—Had men the *like faith* in regard to *another* world; how great an operation would it have in the practice of all virtue!—yet in our *christian* vocation there is no *risque* or danger: we may *gain every thing* by attention and

industry, but can lose nothing. For if we suppose that the gospel is false, and that there is no future state; yet the honour and pleasure of conscious virtue is a full equivalent for any self-denial we shall exert in the practice of it: and therefore we can suffer nothing. But if the Gospel be true, the difference is immense: whether we shall be refused admittance into the future state, and together with the dreadful reproach of our own folly, be doomed to perish in eternal death; or on the contrary, have an abundant entrance administered to us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour. May God of his infinite mercy deliver us from the former, and bestow upon us the latter, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.

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DISCOURSE XV.

The Gospel-Doctrine of the Future Punishment.



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DISCOURSE XV.

The Gospel-Doctrine of a Future

2 THESSALONIANS i. 9.

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.

THE redemption of mankind, or their resurrection to another life, is represented in the *Gospel* as the noblest effect of divine goodness; and the paternal love of the *Father almighty*, in this greatest instance, is recommended with all the force and beauty proper to engage our filial affection and warmest gratitude. At the same time, the *judicial* character of the supreme being, as governor of the world, and *punisher* of wickedness and disobedience, is duely maintained, and the belief of his punishing justice properly enforced, to produce reverence and fear.

WE may perhaps find some difficulty in forming *consistent* ideas, of the inflexible *justice* of God as united with his paternal goodness and *tender mercies over all his works*.—But this difficulty arises from the weakness of our minds. We are apt to imagine that the different acts of punishing and rewarding, or of saving and destroying, proceed from different principles or affections in the divine nature. Whereas every divine act equally springs from the purpose of infinite wisdom, in order to the best ends. And tho' in common and popular language frequent mention is made of the divine *wrath* or *indignation*, which is imputing human passions and resentments to the supreme being: yet in reality, as in general, no human language can express his attributes; so in particular, all *passion* is, strictly speaking, *inconsistent* with the immutable happiness of the divine nature and perfection of his government. If it be thought unworthy of an earthly magistrate to judge with passion

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and punish from resentment; how much more should it be thought incompatible with the all-perfect governor of the universe? — Yet human prejudices are so apt to arise, and intermingle themselves, in our conceptions of the supreme being and his government of the world, that we are continually tempted to ascribe some of our own affections, or indeed infirmities, to him, and to imagine him influenced by such emotions as we experience in our own hearts; as if the infinite and self-existent spirit was little better than such a frail composition of materials as our animal nature; when, in truth, the highest faculties of our rational nature in the best exercise of them, exhibit an image or resemblance of his perfection infinitely obscure and imperfect.

AND some men have been so weak, so misled, or so much influenced in their religious opinions by their own evil hearts, that they have not forbore to ascribe to

God the very worst corruptions of human nature: and as the *Heathens* debased their Gods by ascribing to them bodily appetites, and even the lusts of intemperance; some *Christians* have imputed to the all-perfect Deity the passions of partiality, tyranny and cruelty; and have erected a scheme of notions, in regard to the eternal state of men and the *decrees* of God, contrary to the natural sentiments of humanity, and to the most frequent and express declarations of the *Gospel*. They have represented the Deity as arbitrarily *electing* particular favourites, and placing a partial affection upon them, and *reprobating* or neglecting the rest of mankind; and have described the execution of divine justice in another world as consisting, not in *destroying*, but *preserving* for ever the souls which are condemned, in order to inflict upon them endless and extreme miseries. Both which doctrines are not only void of all foundation in the *holy Scriptures*, but are directly contrary to
many

many explicit assertions of our Saviour and his Apostles.

For they represent the whole scheme of a future state, and the divine purpose of raising mankind to another life, as proceeding from the goodness of God and his fatherly benevolence and clemency; and *that*, not to a few select favourites, but to the world in general. *For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, and sent him, not to condemn the world, not to execute a purpose of displeasure, but to accomplish a scheme of infinite mercy and eternal salvation. And, He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance: and, is no respecter of persons, but accepts all in every nation who fear him and work righteousness. He is the GOD of the Heathens, as well as of the Jews and Christians; and mankind are all his offspring. And he will judge the world in righteousness; not according to any particular secret decrees, but according to his universal, re-*

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vealed, known, immutable, everlasting, most wise, just, and merciful decree, of *rewarding all men according to their works*; and of his infinite goodness will bestow eternal life on all good men; and will in perfect justice punish the wicked, *not by an eternal preservation in misery and torment, but by an eternal destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power.*

Now as this last is a point of great moment; as it is a justice due to every doctrine of *christianity* to rescue it from abuse and ambiguity, and to represent it faithfully and clearly; and as, in this instance, it is taking away a formidable, and indeed unanswerable, objection in the mouth of an infidel against *christianity* itself; I shall proceed to shew, what is the final punishment threatened in the *Gospel* to the wicked and impenitent, adhering closely to the terms of *holy scripture*, which are our only authentic ground of belief,

belief, and which are, if duly attended to, sufficiently plain and explicit: as indeed it would seem unworthy of a divine revelation to leave so momentous an article dubious and perplexed.

WITH this view, let us first consider the plain and *literal*; and secondly, the *figurative* expressions of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*, concerning the final punishment of wicked men in another world.

FIRST, we are to consider the most plain and literal expressions on this subject: for in collecting the sense of holy scripture, these are to be attended to in the first place and principally, and the more dubious and figurative language is to be compared with and explained by them.

Now there are many passages, in which the end of wicked men, or the ultimate punishment to which they shall be adjudged, is defined in the most precise

and intelligible terms, to be, *not an everlasting preservation* in pain and torment, but (as it is expressed in the text) *an everlasting destruction* from that *power* of God, which is equally *able* to destroy, as to preserve, to annihilate, as to create the souls of men. So when our Saviour is fortifying the minds of his disciples against the power of men, by an awe of the far greater power of God, and the punishment of his justice; he expresses himself thus: *Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do; but I will forewarn you whom you shall fear; fear him, who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* Here he plainly proposes the *destruction* of the soul (not its endless pain and misery) as the ultimate effect of the divine displeasure, and greatest object of our fear. And when he describes the great judge of the world, as commanding the criminals to be *brought forth* and *slain* in his presence; the expression evidently imports an absolute *destruction*, and not an end-

endless imprisonment in a place of torments. And when he says, *These shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal*; it appears evident, that, by that *eternal punishment*, which is set in opposition to *eternal life*, is not meant any kind of *life* however miserable, but the same which our Apostle expresses by *everlasting destruction from the presence and power of the almighty judge of life and death*. And the very term, *Death*, is the most frequently made use of, to signify the end of wicked men in another world, or the final effect of divine justice in their punishment.—*The wages of sin*, says the Apostle, *is death*; but *eternal life is the gift of GOD, thro' Jesus Christ our Lord*. And, *If ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if thro' the spirit, ye mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live*.—*To be carnally minded is death*; but *to be spiritually minded is life*.—*Sin when it is finished*, says St. James, *bringeth forth death*.—And our Saviour says, *whoever believeth in me shall never die*,

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or shall not die for ever, but *bath eternal life*.—And *good christians* are said to be *already passed from death unto life*; and on the contrary, *uncharitable and wicked christians* to be *in a state of death*.

WE should now proceed to consider the more *figurative* language of scripture on this subject. But it is proper to observe in passing, that to imagine, that by the term, *death*, is meant an *eternal life* tho' in a condition of extreme *miser*y, seems to be confounding all propriety and meaning of words. *Death*, when applied to the end of wicked men in a future state, properly denotes their *ceasing to exist*, or a *total extinction of life and being*. And it may contribute to fix this meaning, if we observe also, that the bodily dissolution which all men undergo in this world is usually termed by our Saviour and his Apostles, not *death*, but *sleep*: because from *this death* the soul shall be raised to life again: but from the *other*, that which is fully and
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properly death, and of which the former is but an image or shadow, there is no recovery; it is an *eternal death, an everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power.*

WE might let the whole argument rest on the passages already quoted, and others of the like kind; which are as precise and determinate in expressing an utter extinction of being, as any words in familiar use of the language in which the Apostles wrote could express it.

BUT if we proceed to the *figures* by which the eternal punishment of wicked men is described, we shall find them perfectly agreeing to establish the same doctrine.—One *figure* or comparison often used, is that of combustible materials thrown into a *fire*, and which will consequently be entirely consumed, if the fire be not *quenched*. *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and*

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his angels. The meaning is, a total irrevocable destruction. For as *the tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire*, and is thereby destroyed; as the useless *chaff*, when separated from the good grain, is set on fire, and if the fire be not quenched is consumed; so it appears plainly, that the image of *fire unquenchable or everlasting*, is not intended to signify the degree or duration of *torment*, but the absolute certainty of *destruction* beyond all possibility of a recovery. So the cities of *Sodom and Gomorrha* are said to have *suffered the vengeance of an eternal fire*: that is, they were so effectually consumed and destroyed, that they could never be rebuilt: the expression of *eternal fire* signifying the *irrecoverable destruction* of those cities, not the degree or duration of misery of the inhabitants who perished. Again, our Saviour says, *it is better for thee to enter into life blind or maimed, rather than to be cast into hell, where the worm dieth not and the fire is not quenched.*

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The meaning is, it is better to undergo any difficulty, or submit to any loss in this world, in order to obtain the *Life to come*, than with all the advantages of *this life* to suffer at last the total irrecoverable loss of Life and Being. For those images, of *the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched*, are set in opposition to *entering into life*, and are both intended to denote, not any degree or duration of *miser*y, but an absolute *period* of life and existence: for the *worm*, if it continues to live, destroys the patient diseased by it, and the *fire*, if it is not quenched, consumes the fuel that is cast into it. The Prophet *Isaiab* uses the *same* figures to signify the *entire* defeat and slaughter of those who should oppose the designs of providence in the restoration of the *Jewish* state. *They shall go forth, and look on the carcases of them that have transgressed against me; for their worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence of all flesh: that is, they shall be*

so utterly destroyed, that none shall be left to bury the slain, but the carcases shall be a spectacle of abhorrence on the field of battle. So when the same Prophet says, *Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell in everlasting burnings?*—He expresses the great irretrievable calamities and destruction, which he foresaw would come upon the people of *Judea*; without any reference to another world, as we may plainly see by the context of the whole chapter.—In like manner the Author of the book of revelations describes, in the poetic figures of prophecy; the misery and destruction which shall be inflicted *in this world* upon the Abettors of the Antichristian Apostacy. *A third Angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, if any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark on his forehead or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of GOD, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation, and he shall be tormented with fire and*
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brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever, and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. That this passage hath no reference to a future state, and the final punishment of wicked men, will appear evident, if we consider; that the cup of indignation here mentioned is the same with the cup of the wine of the fierceness of divine wrath given to great Babylon, when she came in remembrance before GOD, mentioned, Ch. xvi. 19. and if we compare this passage with the following passages, Ch. xviii. 4. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues: for her sins have reached unto heaven, and GOD hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double, according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled, fill to her double. How

much she hath glorified herself and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her. For she saith in her heart, I sit a Queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning and famine, and she shall be utterly burnt with fire: for strong is the Lord GOD who judgeth her. And the Kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning. And Ch. xix. 3. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever. And again at the 20th verse: And the beast was taken, and with them the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image: these both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone: and the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sate upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth; and all the fowls were filled with their flesh. From comparing these passages it will evidently

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appear that these poetical descriptions wholly relate to public calamities and temporal punishments in this world: in like manner as all the preceding poetical figures at the opening of the *seals*, the sounding of the *trumpets*, and the pouring out of the *vials*. In the following chapter the author extends his view to a *future state*, and represents the final *punishment and destruction* of wicked men by the *like* expressions and figures, by which he hath before described the most terrible judgments of divine providence in *this world*. *And I saw the dead small and great stand before GOD, and the books are opened: and another book was opened which is the book of life; and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and Death and Hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And Death and Hell were cast into the lake of fire: this is the second death. And whosoever*

was not found written in the book of life, was cast into the lake of fire. It is evident here, beyond contradiction, that, *being cast into the lake of fire*, means the same with, *the second death*; and that it cannot possibly mean, a living in torment; for *Death*, and *Hades* (which should have been translated, *the grave*) cannot be tormented; but they may *cease to be*, which is unquestionably the true meaning: and the expression here, of *death and the grave being cast into the lake of fire*, is precisely equivalent to that of the Apostle, *the last enemy which shall be destroyed is death*; or to that of the Prophet, *O death I will be thy plague, O grave I will be thy destruction*. The Scripture-figure therefore, of *being cast into an everlasting or unquenchable fire*, means a total destruction, or annihilation, a period of existence, or *for ever ceasing to be*.

OUR Saviour's parable of the *rich-man* and *Lazarus* (besides its ultimate view) contains a most lively and affecting description

scription of the momentous change and *reverse* of the condition of men in another world: where the diseased and famished beggar is translated to a state of ease and happiness; and the voluptuous, avaritious, and inhuman rich-man is represented as passing at death into a state of misery and torments. But in regard to the subject we are upon, the conclusion we ought to draw from this representation is, not that those torments shall never end, but that the sentence of eternal death shall be executed with more or less misery and torment preceding or attending the final period, in proportion to the greater or less guilt of the criminal: in like manner as in this world, condemned criminals are put to death, with different degrees of preceding pain and horror, proportionate to the several crimes for which they were condemned. This doctrine our Saviour teaches in the plainest and fullest manner. The rich man was void of religion and humanity,

and suffered *Lazarus* to perish at his gate by disease and famine: he is therefore represented by an elegant and striking contrast, as imploring relief in his extreme misery from the hand of *Lazarus*. But in regard to the duration of his misery, the text is wholly silent. In other passages our Saviour expressly assigns different degrees of future misery, in proportion to mens respective degrees of guilt. *The servant*, says he, *who knew his master's will and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew it not and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes.* But if all wicked men shall suffer torments without end, how can any of them be said to suffer but a *few stripes*? Could our Saviour stile infinite sufferings by the soft name of *a few stripes*? It is probable he here alludes to the usual methods amongst the *Jews* of executing malefactors, who were first *scourged with rods* and then put to death; and the scourging was more or less severe

severe and terrible, according to the degree of the crime: and therefore our Lord here points out the different degrees of punishment which shall precede or attend the execution of *eternal death*. In like manner, Matt. v. 22. He describes, under the names and images of present temporal punishment, the degrees of future punishment proportionate to the degrees of guilt there specified. The *Judgment* denotes the lowest degree, the *council* a higher, *Gebenna* the highest. The passage is rendred obscure to the *English* reader, by his not being acquainted with the judicial proceedings customary amongst the *Jews*, and with the proper sense and force of the terms here made use of in reference to those proceedings, and by the mistake of our translators in rendering the word *Gebenna*, *Hell-fire*: whereas it is, *the valley of Hinnom*, that is, a place without the walls of *Jerusalem*, where the carcases of the criminals deprived of burial were thrown and their bones

bones burnt, or where some particular criminals were burnt alive ; both which kinds of punishment were considered by the *Jews* as most severe and dreadful, and as such, were inflicted for the worst of crimes : hence the word *Gebenna* is used by a Metaphor to signify the greatest and last punishment in another world. These and other passages clearly express, what we may most rationally believe, that the sufferings and pains preceding death eternal shall be different, in like manner as those preceding temporal death, and shall be adequate to the respective degrees of guilt, in those who are condemned at the final judgment : and *how great* those sufferings may be, either in *degree* or *duration*, we cannot possibly determine. But we may justly conclude, if the providence of God permits *good* men to endure sometimes much misery, or to be put to a cruel death, in *this* world ; how *much more* dreadful will the *end* of *wicked* men be in *another* world, especially of those
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cruel persecutors who have so inhumanly treated good men in *this*. *They shall be thrown into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* — Nothing can be more just, than that the measure of punishment, assigned to every criminal, should be in proportion to the measure of guilt which he hath contracted; which the doctrine of the Gospel, as before represented, admits and affirms: whereas all degrees and distinctions of punishment seem swallowed up in the notion of never-ending or infinite misery.

AND let it be observed, that death spiritual and eternal, or annihilation, is *properly* stiled in the New Testament an *everlasting* punishment, as it is irrevocable and unalterable for ever, and it is most strictly and literally expressed in the text, *An everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the Glory of his Power.*

IF any Christians imagine, that the foregoing explication of this doctrine may take off some kind of restraint from the minds of wicked men, or give them any encouragement to harden themselves in their wickedness; let such Christians seriously examine and consider, whether it is not the doctrine of our Saviour; and if it be, whether He may not be safely trusted as to the consequences of his own doctrines; whether it is not blaspheming *him*, to assert that any of *his* doctrines serves to encourage wickedness; and whether it be not *absurd in itself* and a manifest contradiction, to suppose, that declaring *the righteous judgment of GOD* against *wicked men*, as determined to punish them with proportionate misery and an *everlasting destruction*, is giving countenance to their wicked practices.

IT is not credible, that any man ever did, or ever can harden himself in wickedness

ness from the mere expectation that his punishment in another world will terminate in his utter destruction. It is not possible that any man can act in defiance to the justice of God and the terrors of hell and eternal damnation from such a belief. Or if there be such a person existing, he must be *already* the most abandoned and incorrigible of mankind. But certainly, human nature is not capable of so desperate and diabolical a resolution: and we only betray the meanness and folly of our own hearts in suspecting this consequence, and in having a worse opinion of mankind than the worst of men deserve.

THE *Gospel-Doctrine* of a total everlasting destruction is much more adapted to bring sinners to repentance than the doctrine of endless misery and torment: because they may be *convinced* of the reason and *justice* of the *former*; but never can be so, of the *latter*.

latter. And it is of the greatest importance that men be convinced, not only that they shall suffer for their sins, but also that they shall suffer *justly*, and no more than their guilt deserves. It is indeed highly requisite, that men should have a profound reverence of the Supreme Being, and a fearful apprehension of the punishment due to wickedness: but it is equally requisite, that this fear be built upon a reasonable foundation, and a persuasion of the *justice* of that punishment: it ought to be the fear of a most righteous and merciful Governor, who punishes in due measure, and to answer a wise and beneficent purpose; not of an unjust and merciless tyrant, “who punishes without measure or end to satisfy an implacable and eternal resentment.” The former is a motive proper to bring sinners to repentance, by convincing them, that if they persist in their wickedness, it will become right and fit in the great Governor of the world, and

requisite to the ends of his *goodness*; to punish and destroy them for ever, in order to put an *end* to their *wickedness*; and for an example to others. But the doctrine of an eternal preservation in the most dreadful torments is not proper to bring men to repentance, or to promote virtue in the world. On the contrary, this *antichristian* doctrine hath actually produced much wickedness, and of the worst kind, and hath served also to harden men in it.

THE more we study human nature, and understand what influence different principles have upon the temper and conduct of mankind, and are acquainted with the religious history of the christian world; the more we shall be convinced of this. When men have been guilty of enormous crimes, or abandoned themselves to some vicious courses, but at length begin to think of another world, and what their own condition will be after death; then, to be persuaded

suaded of *the righteous judgment of GOD*, and that he will punish impenitent sinners in a terrible and exemplary manner, but no more than their iniquities deserve, or than the ends of government and the purposes of wisdom and goodness require; this persuasion will lead them to a true repentance, as it implies a conviction of the mischievous heinous and criminal nature of their own actions, and tends to inspire them with an abhorrence and dread, not of *GOD*, but of *their own wickedness* and ill deserts, and with a veneration and esteem of the Almighty Governor of the world for his very *justice*, tho' it condemns them; because they believe that his intention in punishing is to prevent the progress of wickedness, and put an end to misery; not to make wickedness and misery immortal. *This fear of God* is consistent with the *love* of him, and with the highest confidence in his paternal goodness and saving mercy: hence they naturally reflect upon their own
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disingenuity and ingratitude ; in transgressing the will of the wisest and best of Governors. And this temper is the true spirit of *repentance towards GOD*, and the spring of humility, justice and charity towards men.

BUT on the other hand, if they believe that God will punish beyond all bounds of justice, and will *preserve* condemned sinners *alive* for ever, in order to wreak upon them an insatiable eternal vengeance ; and that it is his design not to extirpate and destroy, but to *preserve* and increase *wickedness* and *misery* in the creation ; this opinion, the more seriously they attend to it and believe it, the more it will *prevent* true repentance : it can only serve to confound the mind, and to absorb and destroy the best principles of true religion, and particularly to exclude from the heart all *love* of God and all *confidence* in his justice and goodness. For let men *pretend* what they

will, they *cannot* esteem, love, and confide in a *tyrant*, or a being whose will and pleasure is to make *wickedness and misery endless*. They may be Hypocrites thro' fear, and profess love with their mouths; but secretly and in their hearts they will have an aversion to him: they will hate *GOD* more than *themselves*, and abhor *his government* more than their *own sins* and ill deserts. At best, this opinion will *only* produce a slavish dread and terror which may compel men to worship God *against* their inclination, and *praise him with their lips*, while *their hearts* are not only *estranged* from him, but utterly *averse* to him.

It is indeed readily allowed, that this opinion may have driven some men to use certain means, by which to avoid that relentless and insatiable vengeance, which they impiously ascribed to God. But by what means? Not by repentance and the practice of sobriety, humanity, and charity;
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but by penances, pilgrimages, unctions, auricular confessions, priestly absolutions, and all the low tricks of *superstition*; which correspond to the base and unworthy notions they had formed to themselves of the Supreme Being: Or else, where it made a more deep and violent impression, it hath driven men to a gloomy bitterness of temper, and inspired them with a dark and fierce *enthusiasm*; and they have sought to compensate for their vices, to appease the deity, and recommend themselves to his favour, by a furious bigotted zeal for a particular church or party, and by hating and persecuting others, whom they vainly and presumptuously stiled enemies of God and religion.

SUCH have been the real and natural consequences of this *Antichristian* doctrine. For according to men's sentiments of God and of the designs and measures of his government, such hath been the influence of

religion on their temper and conduct. And if they have not framed to themselves a God after their own evil hearts, they have framed their own hearts agreeable to that false and *evil character*, which they were taught to ascribe to God. And when they have believed the deity to *love* and *hate*, to *elect* and *reprobate* nations, parties, or individuals, without reason or regard to the ends of good government, and to pursue those, whom he hath thus reprobated, with an endless and insatiable resentment; they themselves have become more arbitrary, bigotted, fierce, unmerciful, and more addicted to hate and persecute their fellow-creatures, all who were not of their own church, and whom they supposed to be reprobated of God.—It is hardly credible; that inhumanity and *cruelty* would ever have been carried to such *excess* in the christian world, as they actually have been, had they not derived countenance and support from these *Antichristian* and barbarous

notions. Tyrants and persecutors, if they have not invented these doctrines, yet have applied them to excuse to their own consciences, and vindicate to others, the most iniquitous and cruel proceedings; and when they have made the very worst use of their power in persecuting good men, at least men who deserve no such punishment, they have persuaded themselves and others, that they were acting like the *Deity*, espousing *his* cause, and maintaining *his* character and *his* glory.

THE court of *inquisition*, as established in many countries, and as far as it differs from civil-courts of judicature, is declared by the authors and maintainers of it to be the nearest *imitation* of the divine tribunal; and it is avowedly founded upon and justified by the doctrines of *reprobation* and of *eternal torments*. Jews, Infidels, and Heretics are judged in that court to be criminals, and are condemned. And how do

they vindicate this procedure; but by supposing them to be all reprobated and abhorred of GOD? And they execute them, not by a quick dispatch, but by the most lingering torments. And what do they plead for this cruelty; but that it is an *act of Faith*, that they are doing the *work of GOD*, and that he will expose those wretches to the like torments *for ever*? — Thus they conquer *nature* by *Faith*, as they express it: that is, they extinguish all sense of justice and relentings of mercy in their own nature, and harden themselves in iniquity and barbarity, by the belief of *these very doctrines* we are exposing: and by them they defend themselves in the face of the world, and give a colour and sanction of *religion* to the most enormous wickedness.

THE only way to promote sobriety, justice, humanity, and every virtue in the world, is by representing truly and recommending

mending strongly the characters of the Deity and his government, as contained in the *real* doctrines of our *Saviour* and his *Apostles*: that he is the most just and merciful Father and governor of all mankind; who will by no means clear the guilty, or suffer the impenitent workers of iniquity to escape, and will assuredly *punish* them with an *everlasting destruction* from his own presence and by his own glorious power; but who in all the measures of his government intends the best ends, and to promote the good of the whole; to *destroy for ever*, not to *preserve for ever*, the souls of the wicked; to make *virtue and happiness*, not *wickedness and misery*, everlasting.—This belief of religion will have a most happy effect, in reclaiming men from vice and exciting them to virtue, and is every way proper to engage our reverence of God and our charity to all men, and to make us *love the Lord our GOD, and serve him with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and*

strength; which is our highest excellence and happiness.

To sum up the whole in a few words.
—To increase wickedness and misery in the creation, and to make them *endless*, is the work and design of the *Devil*. To impute the *same* design to the all-perfect and ever-blessed *GOD*, is no better than the greatest *impiety*. And to imagine that such a doctrine can do any good in the world, is great *weakness* and folly. Some men are amazingly forward, even while they *praise* God with their *mouths*, to harbour an *ill-opinion* of him in their *hearts*, and suspect him of having unjust or cruel designs. The timidity and melancholy of some, and the artifice and tyranny of others, lay the ground-work of such *diabolical* delusions. But *Christians* should know better: and if they have been *taught* otherwise, if they are yet ignorant of *the truth as it is in Jesus*, and have not the
know-

knowledge of GOD their most righteous Governor and merciful Father in heaven, it is high time they should learn to understand their own religion.

THE true doctrine of the Gospel is most honourable to the Supreme Governor of the world, maintains the perfect consistency of his justice and mercy, and shews that the measures of his government are calculated, to prevent, destroy, and extirpate wickedness and misery, to purge at last the whole creation from every evil, to collect together, as our Saviour expresses it, *all things that offend and them which do iniquity, and cast them into a furnace of fire, where they shall be utterly consumed and never more exist.* John the forerunner of Christ, describes him by the sublime character and office of being the minister of divine justice and mercy to mankind, *whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather the wheat into his garner,*

garner, but burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire, that is, utterly destroy it: then wickedness and misery shall cease for ever, death shall be destroyed, and destruction itself come to an utter end.

THE practical language of the New Testament corresponds to the doctrine as before explained: and it remains that we attend to the Gospel-admonitions, to *chuse the way of life, that our souls may live*, and to avoid the fatal paths that lead to eternal destruction. The gate of the former is strait and the way narrow, and it is requisite to strive to gain that important pass. But if it was the dearest possession in the world, if it was a right hand or eye, that is an obstacle preventing our entrance into life eternal; it is better to part with it and cast it from us, than with it to perish for ever. For what is a man profited, if he could gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, his own life and being for ever? Or what can possibly

sibly be given to a man of equal value in exchange for his own life and being? It is not a few years in this world, but *life* and *death* absolute and *eternal* which are set before us. This is the very condition of our existence; there is no possibility of avoiding the momentous choice; and there is some difficulty in determining aright; and more, in adhering to that determination. But the first thing requisite is to convince ourselves thoroughly of the vast importance of our present conduct, and to have our minds awake and eyes open to look before us, and attend to the final consequences of things. As it is not easy for children to be persuaded, or bring themselves to apprehend, what is requisite or pernicious to their future health and life in this world; so men are not easily aware of the eternal consequences of their present actions. There are so many things to bribe their judgment, or divert their attention, or benumb their hearts, or alter their
their

their resolutions, that *the gate is found to be wide and the way broad that leadeth to destruction, and many go in thereat*; and it is not without some difficulty that any are reclaimed and brought back into *the way of life*.—*Are there few that be saved!*—

is a question to which no answer ought to be expected, but those persuasions to use our best endeavours, and those descriptions of the qualifications requisite to salvation, which are to be found so frequent, so clear, and so cogent, in the writings of the Gospel, *That we would flee from the wrath to come, and let the goodness and patience of GOD lead us to repentance*; and not, *after the hardness and impenitence of our hearts, treasure up for ourselves wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of GOD*; but on the contrary, *by a patient continuance in well-doing, seek for honour and immortality, that we may gain eternal life*; and that we do not thro' corrupt prejudices mistake the way of salvation,

tion, and what we must do to inherit eternal life; but if we would enter into life, keep the commandments of God; that we do not deceive ourselves with a vain show and empty professions, for GOD is not mocked, and whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap: he that soweth to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap an incorruptible and immortal life. Do ye not know, says the Apostle, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of GOD? Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of GOD. — Our blessed Saviour hath most plainly and authentically specified the terms of our acceptance with God, and the duties requisite to salvation: and whosoever beareth his sayings and doth them builds his hope of eternal life on an immoveable foundation: but hearing
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ing and not doing, professing and not practising, believing and not obeying, or to speak more properly, *pretending* to believe and to have *Faith* separate from works of obedience, is only heaping up to ourselves the greater confusion and ruin. And the grand event, the sublime mystery of a world to come, and of eternal life and death, is revealed in the Gospel, with such perspicuity of doctrine and force of application, as cannot fail to impress an attentive mind, and have a powerful effect. The favour or displeasure of the Almighty Governor of the universe; glory and immortality, or misery and destruction; *everlasting life*, or *death eternal*; are solemnly propounded to the belief, choice, and pursuit of mankind: and the way to avoid the one and obtain the other clearly described.

LET us wisely attend to these things, which are alone of infinite moment to us, and not let them slip out of our minds,

or

or be choaked with the *cares of this world* and the *deceitfulness of riches*; that we may escape the condemnation of the wicked, even *everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord*, and may inherit that *eternal life, which is the gift of GOD* (and which may God of his infinite mercy grant to us) *thro' Jesus Christ our Lord.*

may God of his infinite mercy grant to us)

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F U T U R E P U N I S H M E N T.

B Y S A M U E L B O U R N.

Shall not the Judge of the whole Earth do Right?

GENESIS xviii. 25.

Illa suspicio intolerabili dolore cruciat, si opinamur eos, quibus orbat sumus, esse cum aliquo sensu iis in malis, quibus vulgò opinantur. Hanc excutere opinionem mihi met volui radicitus.

CIC. Tusc. Qu. Lib. i.

M. Hæc fortasse metuis, & idcirco mortem censes esse sempiternum malum. A. Adeone me delirare censes, ut ita esse credam? M. An tu hæc non credis? A. Minime verò. M. Male hercule narras. A. Cur, quæso? M. Quia disertus esse possem, si contra ista dicerem. A. Quis enim non in ejusmodi causa? aut quid negotii est, hæc poetarum & pictorum portenta convincere? M. Atque pleni sunt libri Philosophorum contra ista ipsa differentium. A. Ineptè sanè: quis est enim tam excors, quem ista moveant?

Ibid.

L O N D O N :

Printed for R. GRIFFITHS, at the DUNCIAD, opposite
SOMERSET-HOUSE in the STRAND.

MDCCCLIX.

By SAMUEL BOURN

[illegible]

London:
Printed for R. Gifford at the Diamond, opposite
Somerset House in the Strand.
MDCCLXXII.

I am more ready to grant my own Co-
rrectly in making this public Request,
as I am persuaded, that there is nothing

LETTER
TO THE

Rev^d. SAMUEL CHANDLER, D. D.

REVEREND SIR,

Norwich, Sept. 24, 1759.

HAVING heard you publicly assert
some Time ago, "That the Doctrine
of *Annihilation*, or, that the Souls
of wicked Men shall be totally destroyed in
the future State," is utterly inconsistent with
the Christian Scheme; and as you did not
at that Time produce any Argument of
Reason, or Authority of Scripture, to prove
what you had asserted; it raised in me a
Curiosity to know by what Proof you are
able to support your Assertion; in Hope of
receiving such Satisfaction, as may be ex-
pected from a Gentleman of your known

Abilities, and Study of the Christian Revelation.

I am more ready to gratify my own Curiosity in making you this public Request, as I am persuaded, that there is nothing more conducive to the Discovery of Truth, than if those who studied the same Subject, yet are of contrary Opinions, enter into a mutual Disquisition of each others Arguments, and, with an amicable Spirit of free Inquiry, examine the Strength of what may be alledged on both Sides.

That I am of an Opinion directly opposite to yours, you need not to be informed: Nor do I see the least Reason to avoid either a public Declaration, or Defence, of my Opinion. For, as long as I remain fully convinced, as I am at present, That that Doctrine which you asserted, more than once, to be absolutely inconsistent with the Christian Scheme, is the *very Doctrine of Christianity*; it will not affect me in the least, whether the Opinion which I maintain, be thought old, or new, common, or singular, popular, or unpopular.

That Men who apply their Minds to the Study of Religion and the Holy Scriptures, should

should be of different and even contrary Opinions, is certainly no new Thing in the Christian World. But that such should conspire by a joint Examination and friendly Controversy, to investigate Truth for themselves and others, in a Subject concerning which they totally differ, is (I am sorry to say) something new and uncommon. But as the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews exhorts them *To provoke one another* (as our Translators have rendered it) *to Love and good Works*; so I do not doubt, but you, as well as every other Reader of this Pamphlet, will approve my Conduct, in inviting and urging you in this public Manner, to a friendly Discussion of so important a Subject, as this before us.

The Importance of it will, I apprehend, be readily allowed; especially, by those who have a real Concern for the Credit of the Christian Religion. At least, it appears of so much Consequence to me, That if it should be proved, that the final Punishment threatened to wicked Men in the New Testament, is not a total Destruction, but an endless Preservation in a State of Misery and Torment; this would, in my Opinion, fix a greater Odium upon Christianity, and raise a stronger Objection to it, than all its Adversaries

Adversaries have yet been able to produce: And, I will venture to assert, that there are many Persons in this Nation, of no inconsiderable Understanding, who would be strongly disposed to reject the New Testament as a Divine Revelation, if they were convinced that it contains such a Doctrine.

For, that any Doctrine should be true, and have the real Stamp of Divine Authority, which ascribes to the supreme Governor of the Universe, a Conduct unworthy of any Prince, or Governor on Earth, and repugnant to our best Conceptions of the Measures and Ends of good Government; cannot easily be admitted by Persons of a thoughtful and ingenuous Mind. To overcome the Antipathy of a good Heart, and the Remonstrance of a reasoning Mind against it, will require an immense Weight of external Evidence.

A Limitation of Punishments is essential to all good Government: To extend them beyond the Limits of Reason, or of Law, which is the public Reason, is one Characteristic of Tyranny. Where Punishments are extended, or increased, so far as the public Safety and Welfare require, and no further; *i. e.* where they are always limited and directed by a View to the Happiness

pineness of the Whole; there is good Government: But where they are increased, either in Degree, or Duration, beyond what is requisite to that End; there is Tyranny: Where they are unlimited, or infinite; there is the greatest Tyranny: For to punish a Criminal in an excessive Degree, and beyond what the Ends of good Government require, is as real Injustice and Cruelty, as to inflict a lesser Degree of Punishment upon an innocent Person. For in both Cases, it is equally inflicting Misery, not to answer any necessary, or useful End, but for the mere sake of increasing Misery; which is the *worst End* that can be conceived.

There neither is, nor can be, any other Difference, between the best and the worst Government possible; than that the former is administered with a View to produce and maintain the greatest Virtue and Happiness, and to prevent, or extinguish, as much as possible, Wickedness and Misery; and the latter with a View to prolong and encrease Wickedness and Misery. Now, whether the *endless* Preservation of wicked Spirits, in order to inflict upon them *infinite* Miseries, be more consistent with the *former*, or the *latter* Kind of Government, is not difficult to be determined. Their Wickedness, or their Misery, may be a Reason in the Mind
of

of a good Governor, for destroying them: But the contrary, viz. preserving them for ever in a State of Wickedness and Misery, appears more conducive to the Ends of the *worst* Government, than of the *best*.

To alledge, That human Ignorance is so great, and our Ideas of what is fittest and best so imperfect, that we can form no Judgment of what the Ends of Divine Government may require; and that therefore, for ought we know, *infinite* Punishment, and the *endless* Existence of some Beings in the *greatest* Misery, may be made subservient, by the incomprehensible Wisdom of Providence, to the greatest Virtue and Happiness of the Universe;—is only arguing from a *supposed Possibility* against the greatest *Probability*; and endeavouring, under Color of human Ignorance, to screen a Doctrine apparently most injurious to the Character of the Supreme Being.

In human Governments, extreme and lingering Punishments are a certain Mark of Barbarity, and a Criterion by which to distinguish a *Tyrant* from a *just and good Prince*. In the best constituted Governments, Punishments are the mildest, in the worst, the severest. For a perfect *Tyranny*,

is supported solely by *Fear*; but a just and legal Government, by *better Principles and Affections*. And whether, the *best*, or the *worst* Governments on Earth, are most like the *Divine*; whether the greatest *Tyrants*, or the most beneficent and *merciful Princes*, most resemble the perfect Governor of the *Universe*; no one will hesitate in deciding.

But, indeed, in all human Governments, even the worst, *Death* (which is *Annihilation* in respect to human Society) is the ultimate Punishment: And all that is added, by those Judges who proceed to the extremest Rigor, is an Augmentation, for a short Space of Time, of the Horrors and Agonies preceding, or attending the Execution. And it is hardly to be conceived, that any Prince, though absolute in Power, tyrannical in Disposition, and both injured and incensed to the highest Degree, would not, in length of Time, think Justice satisfied, if not feel his own Resentment satiated, by the extreme and lasting Miseries of the Criminal: And the Idea of making these Miseries everlasting, was this in his Power, would be found too abhorrent to Reason and Humanity, to be long entertained in a human Breast.

B

How

How then can we think of imputing a Procedure, exceeding the Severity of the greatest Tyrant, and of the worst of Governments on Earth, to that Being, whom we stile the best; *whose tender Mercies are over all his Works*; whom we ought to Love with all our Hearts, and to contemplate with the greatest Delight; and in whose Designs and Measures we ought to place an entire Confidence? Why do we stile him *most merciful*? Why address him as THE FATHER OF MANKIND? — A *Father*, indeed, may punish a wicked and disobedient Son: *i. e.* May withdraw his Favour from him, may disinherit him, may inflict Stripes, or other Penalties upon him; nay, acting as Magistrate and Judge, may put him to Death. But what should we think of that *Father*, who acting in the Capacity of a Judge over his offending Offspring, would not be satisfied (be their Crimes ever so great) either with their total Destruction, or their suffering for any limited Duration, or the Addition of the former to the latter; but who would rather judge them to *live for ever*, than to *perish for ever in Fire unquenchable*? — How could such a Judgment consist either with the Equity of Government, or the Clemency

Clemency of a Judge? How much less with the Disposition of a Parent? — How vain is it to compliment the Almighty with the Titles of *most Just* and *most Merciful*; if at the same Time we ascribe to him a Conduct, not only inconsistent with the *Paternal* Character, but irreconcilable to our clearest Notions of *Justice* as well as *Mercy*?

Nothing is of greater importance to Religion, than to preserve the Character of the Supreme Being inviolate: For without this Foundation it cannot be supported; but will be apt to degenerate into slavish Superstition, or a blind and savage Enthusiasm. Yet, perhaps, no Character in the World has been more mistaken, or traduced, and, consequently, suffered more Reproach and Injury from the Tongues and Pens of Men: Whilst not understanding the Nature and End of Government in general; nor having formed any clear and consistent Notions of Justice and Mercy, or of that public Utility, which ought always to be intended and answered, by punishing as well as by rewarding; they have erected, in their own Imagination, a Scheme of Government, according to their own narrow, partial, arbitrary, or enthusiastic Conceits; and have

fondly imputed this Scheme, to the most sublime and excellent Being, whose Wisdom and Goodness are infinite, whose Thoughts and Designs excel those of the wisest and best Men, *as the Heavens are above the Earth.*

Nothing then can be more becoming those, who are appointed to be Ministers of Religion, and Guardians of its Truth and Purity, than to vindicate God's Government of the World, and to rescue that most sublime and sacred Character, which we should always contemplate with the highest Veneration and Affection, from those unworthy Notions, which Men are apt to intermix with their Belief of a Deity; and especially, from those black Calumnies, by which he is represented as no better, in effect, than the greatest Tyrant, instead of being the most just, beneficent and merciful Governor. For the Influence which Religion has upon the Dispositions and Morals of Mankind, will be useful, or hurtful, in proportion as their Sentiments of the Divine Nature and Government are Good, or Evil. The worst Evils of Superstition and Enthusiasm have their Source in an unjust, or partial Opinion of the Deity. Nor can the Belief of his Existence, or Almighty

mighty Power, produce any good Effects, separate from a Belief of his perfect Justice and Goodness. A just Esteem of the Deity, therefore, is that Spring of true Religion and Virtue, which ought to be preserved, as much as possible, pure and untainted in the Minds of Men.

It is more curious and difficult than necessary, to account for the Propensity of Mankind, to receive and retain such ill Impressions of the Deity, and his Government of the World. Whether they may be ascribed to those Fears and Horrors, which are apt sometimes, especially in some Persons, to seize and wholly possess the Imagination, and thereby disturb and over-power their Reason:— Or, to their violent Resentments against those who offend and injure them, which tempt them to avenge themselves in proportion to their own Power, rather than to do Justice in proportion to the Offence; and hence lead them to imagine, that the greater Power the Person offended is possessed of, the greater Punishment he will consequently inflict:— Or, whether they may be owing in some Instances to the Strength of any other Passions;— so much is certain, That human Passions and Affections, either separate or united, have a great Influence

Influence upon their Understandings, and contribute both to form and confirm their particular Sentiments of the Character and Disposition of the Supreme Being.

It may be equally difficult to trace out with any Precision, how such Opinions have actually arisen and spread in the World; particularly this barbarous Notion of a State of never-ending Misery and Torment. The Heathen Poets adopted the vulgar Fables, in regard to the different Species of the Infernal Torments. And *Virgil* assigns a perpetual Duration of Misery to some Criminals; — “*Sedet æternumque sedebit Infelix Ixæus* :”—though to others he is so favourable as to allow, in process of Time, a Release: So that his Doctrine has a remarkable Conformity to the Popish Hell and Purgatory.— But it was the Business of the Poets to affect the Imagination: And to this End, they made the like Use of the fabulous Traditions of their Times, as *Shakespeare* does of his Witches and Apparitions, — These were the *Poetarum & Pictorum Portenta*, which *Cicero*, as a Philosopher, speaks of with so much Contempt, as to say, “Who can be so senseless as to give any Credit to them?”

Mahomet seems to adopt the Doctrine of
 eternal Torments in good Earnest; and
 thunders it out, not only against Criminals,
 but against all who do not receive his *Koran*.
 His Language is, " They shall undergo the Ri-
 " gours of an infinite Pain.— They shall never
 " be eased in their Torments.— They shall
 " be eternally confined in the Fire of Hell.
 " —They shall dwell there eternally.— God
 " will change their burned Skin into a new
 " Skin, that they may suffer the more.—
 " He hath prepared Hell for them, where
 " they shall remain eternally. — The Infidels
 " shall be encompassed with Flames of
 " Hell. — They shall have Shirts of Fire.—
 " Boiling Water shall flow in upon their
 " Heads:— The Fire shall burn what is in
 " their Bellies, and shall roast their Skin.—
 " They shall be beaten with Clubs of Iron.
 " —When they think to go out of this
 " Fire, they shall enter further into it.—
 " They shall *not die* in those Torments, and
 " their Torture shall never be asswaged.—
 " They shall in vain implore Succour of
 " God. — They shall demand of the Keeper
 " of the Fire, Will thy Lord never deliver
 " us from these Pains?— He shall answer
 " them, Ye shall abide there eternally.—
 " They shall never get out of this Fire,
 " neither

“ neither be able to repent. — Their Pains
 “ shall be augmented, and Pains upon
 “ Pains.”

It appears then, that this Doctrine of eternal Torments, is certainly a *Mahometan*, if not a *Heathen* Doctrine. But whether it be a *Jewish*, or a *Christian* Doctrine, remains a Subject of Inquiry.

I have not yet been able to discover any Thing like it, in the Writings of the *Old Testament*: And am fully convinced that *those Passages* in the New, which have been thought to imply it most strongly, do directly, and in the strongest Manner imply the contrary. — And for Proof of this, I beg leave to refer you to a Discourse, now going to be published.

If the Expressions of *being thrown into a Furnace of Fire — cast into a Lake of Fire — into everlasting Fire — into Hell, where the Worm dieth not, and the Fire is not quenched*; — do not import a total Destruction, or Annihilation; I must confess myself to be utterly at a Loss; and must beg your kind Assistance, in order to find out the Meaning of them.

If

If I tell a Man whose House is on Fire, That that Fire is *unquenchable*; the Meaning is the same, as if I told him, that his House would be entirely destroyed. If I tell a Gardener, whose Plants, or the Blossoms, are infected by the Worm, That he cannot kill that Worm, or, that *it will not die*; it is the same Thing as if I told him, that his Fruit will come to nothing, or his Plants die. Or, if a Patient is afflicted with a Distemper, which is supposed to proceed from Worms, and he is told that *the Worm will not die*; the meaning of the Phrase must be, that the Disease will end in the Death of the Patient. And if such Phrases be considered as proverbial among the Jews, and that when any Person fell into any Distemper, or Calamity, that would certainly end in Destruction, it was usual for them to say, "That is a Worm that will not die;" or, "That is a Fire that will not be quenched;" the Sense is perfectly intelligible: They meant that it was a lost Case; that there was no Possibility of preventing the Destruction of the Person, or Thing, to which they applied the Proverb.

Besides, there is something absurd and *contradictory* in the Image made use of, if we suppose Chaff, Wood, or other useless Materials, thrown into an unquenchable

C

Fire,

Fire, and yet not to be consumed and destroyed in that Fire; or, a living Creature cast into it, and yet preserved alive for ever in it: For, throwing into the Fire is always understood, to be the most effectual Way to *destroy* a Thing: And the *less* *extinguishable* the Fire is, the *more* *certainly* will the Subject thrown in be *consumed*. And the original Term, καὶ ἀκαταίεον, properly translated, is, *To burn up*, or *utterly consume by Fire*: which is directly contrary to a Being preserved in the Fire. *Who shall burn up the Chaff with unquenchable Fire.* John iii. 12. The Expression here is probably borrowed from Malachi iv. 1. *For behold the Day cometh that shall burn as an Oven; and all the Proud, yea, and all that do wickedly shall be Stubble; and the Day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts, that it shall leave them neither Root nor Branch.*—Similar to this is the Expression in the Epistle to the Hebrews: *Our God is a CONSUMING Fire*, καὶ ἀναλίσκων: Which signifies, utterly destroying; the very reverse of preserving.—There is, indeed, so direct a Contradiction between the Idea of preserving any Creature alive, and that of throwing it into a Fire, a Fire that cannot be extinguished; that if duly considered, it is amazing how Men came to join so opposite Ideas together,

together, or imagine them to be consistent. This inconsistency *Mabomet* ridiculously attempts to reconcile by saying, "That God will change their burned Skin into a new Skin, that they may suffer the more."

Fire is, indeed, an Instrument of *Torture*, as well as of *Destruction*. But why Men should think it more becoming the most just and merciful Governor of the World, to make it an Instrument of *everlasting Torment* to his offending Creatures, rather than of their *everlasting Destruction*; or why, they should be disposed to take the Words of Scripture in a Sense contradictory to Reason, Justice and Humanity, when they will not only admit of, but are *most naturally* understood in a different Sense, agreeable to Justice and Clemency; is to me inconceivable.

The Subject is reducible, as far as the Christian Revelation is concerned, to this single Question: Whether the afore-mentioned Expressions are intended to convey to us the Idea of everlasting Torture, or of everlasting Destruction, *i. e.* Annihilation? — Perhaps, some may be inclined to think, that they serve to convey Ideas, both of Torture, and of total Destruction. With such

Persons (if there are any) I desire to have no Controversy. Because on this supposition, the Torment or Misery cannot be infinite. And it is only that Mahometan, Pagan, and (as I must confess it appears to me at present) most absurd, cruel, Anti-Christian, and diabolical Doctrine of *infinite*, or *never-ending* Misery and Torment, which I am opposing, and endeavouring to eradicate: "*Quam excutere opinionem* (to use the Words of Cicero) *nihilmet volui radicitus.*"

That there are Passages in the New Testament which imply, that the Sentence of eternal Death shall be executed upon Criminals with Circumstances of Ignominy, Horror and Pain, *proportionate* to their Guilt, I readily allow and affirm: Yet am not of Opinion, that the Figures of being *cast into unquenchable Fire*, and the like, are intended to convey to us *any* Idea of Torment, but *solely* that of total *Destruction*, or Annihilation, or a ceasing to exist. And the Passage in the Book of Revelations, where it is said, that *Death and Hell* (i. e. *Hades*) *shall be cast into the Lake of Fire*, seems to me decisive in this Point. For certainly the meaning there is, not that *Death and Hades* shall be *tormented* (which is ridiculous) but that they shall be *abolished*.

But

But it is not my Design, either to Trouble you with a superfluous Repetition of what hath been suggested in the Discourse referred to, or to *exhaust* the Subject: But only to represent to you in few Words, the View which I have of it at present; and to intreat your friendly Assistance, in further explaining the Subject, and either rectifying, or confirming my Sentiments.

And give me leave to say, Sir, That it is a Subject worthy of your Pen: That according as the Doctrine of future Punishment, is differently explained and believed, it will very differently affect Mens Opinion of the Supremie Being: And that in a Cause, in which the Honour of God, and the Credit of the Christian Revelation, are so immediately concerned, you cannot find yourself unconcerned.

For my own Part, I am persuaded, that the vulgar Notion of eternal Torments has been productive, not of Virtue and Happiness, but of Wickedness and Misery in the World, where it has been most seriously and steddily believed. However, Consequences are not the Subject of our Enquiry, but the Truth of the Doctrine. The proper Question is, What is the Doctrine of
our

our Saviour?—When that is determined ;
if any Man, after allowing the Doctrine to
be *His*, yet shall impute ill Effects to it, or
assert that it ought not to be preached, or
published ; he pretends to be wiser than our
Saviour, and is guilty of an Arrogance in-
consistent with his Christian Profession.

That you bear a more free and noble
Mind than to be influenced by vulgar Pre-
judices, or infected with an Itch of Popu-
larity, or biassed by any mean Considerations ;
I am most willing to believe. And there-
fore hope, that you will favour myself, and
others, with a public Explanation of your
Sentiments ; and, if you think proper to
take Pen in Hand, cannot easily doubt of
your doing ample Justice to so important
and interesting a Subject.

I am, with sincere Esteem,

Yours, &c.



SAMUEL BOURN.